The Story of a Marriage

3 Vols

6537
368 fw

£3/10/-

THE STORY OF A MARRIAGE

VOL. I.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

THE

STORY OF A MARRIAGE

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
WARD & DOWNEY
12 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN
1889

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TO

S. B.

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THE

STORY OF A MARRIAGE

CHAPTER I.

COOMBE DELAWAY.

THE manor house at Coombe Delaway nestled at the foot of a wooded hill that gave it shelter from the north and east, while its fair front lay open to the shining west. All its casements, to the uppermost dormer windows, flashed back the bright rays of the sun, and the clipped yews in the terraced garden threw fantastic outlines of clear-cut shadows on the grass. The house was a red-brick Elizabethan building with massive fluted chimney stacks, like gigantic pandean pipes,

down which the wind blew many a wild tune on a winter's night. But in the quiet of a summer's afternoon the silence was broken only by the occasional screech of the peacock that strutted to and fro on the terrace, spreading his argus-eyed tail, in the absence of all beholders, merely for his own delight.

For more than three hundred years Coombe Delaway had been the home of the Stapletons. Each generation had embellished the house with all that was deemed most beautiful in its age, till in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when domestic luxury amounts to an art, and is pursued with passion, it had become an earthly paradise. No sound of the outer striving, suffering world need penetrate these sheltering walls. Here poverty had never shown its grim face. Never had the sordid, carking cares of life forced themselves upon the dwellers beneath this ample roof, and each babe born into the Stapleton family

had arrived to an inheritance ordained for it before its birth. Everything had been theirs that this world can give of wealth and honour, of the joy of life in a beautiful country, and of the beneficent use of power in the care of their dependants. In the discharge of their duties as landowners, and cultivators, and magistrates the men of the family had developed many fine qualities, and the present owner of Coombe Delaway was in every way worthy of his forefathers. John Stapleton had the air of a man accustomed to be obeyed, who is at ease with himself and the world around him. He would pay tribute to Cæsar, but would also exact payment of the tribute due to himself. Distinctly a proud man, John Stapleton's pride was not of birth, wealth, or position. His pride was of the kind that has often sustained the sinking heart of the poor. He was proud of the faithful discharge of his duty, of his word being his bond, of his equal dealings with high and

low. In appearance he was a typical Englishman, tall and stout, hair and complexion tending to red, with kindly grey eyes, and a genial smile on his large, firm mouth.

In his marriage with a woman many years younger than himself he was fortunate and happy, and the wide difference in age between them gave to the husband's love for his young wife an almost fatherly tenderness and pride, and he delighted in her youth and vivacity. To look at Mrs. Stapleton's sweet face, with her soft, beaming eyes, it was impossible to suppose that she had, or imagined that she had, a trouble upon earth. But as years went by, and no children were born to her, she longed more and more for the one good gift that heaven withheld, and there were times when she envied the wife of the poorest labourer on the estate, who stood at her cottage door with a babe in her arms. In the midst of all the happiness that enfolded her, Mrs. Stapleton was conscious of a

very real void in her life, and it was for lack of the absorbing interest that children would have supplied her with that she was driven to bestow so much love and thought upon her only brother, Laurence Temple. She had studied him since he was a child, and he was still a puzzle to her. At once the gentlest and most obstinate of men, dreamy and unpractical, he was yet capable of surprising his friends by translating some visionary scheme into action, and carrying out an idea to its logical conclusion.

The afternoon post had just brought Mrs. Stapleton a letter from Laurence, and she entered the library, where her husband was reading, to tell him the good news.

'O John, is it not delightful? Laurence will be with us to-morrow evening,' and she laughed a little pleased laugh as she replaced the letter in its envelope.

Mr. Stapleton closed his book, and looked up at his wife's beaming face.

'I am always glad to see Laurence, and, more than that, I am interested too.'

'Of course you are, my dear, for my brother is the most interesting young man that we know, and if he could be persuaded to take life a shade less seriously he would be absolutely perfect.'

'Then, Norah, you ought to be thankful for any little failing that saves your brother from perfection. I hate your perfect men. You can explore their whole character. There is no pleasing element of mystery or uncertainty in them; they leave nothing to the imagination,' and Mr. Stapleton reopened the volume he had closed, as though he wished to continue his reading undisturbed.

'It cannot be said that Laurence leaves nothing to the imagination, for it is impossible to conjecture what new idea may have sprung up in his mind since we last met. Do you remember when he came to us last year from Cambridge for part of the Easter vacation,'

continued Mrs. Stapleton, seating herself on a low chair by her husband, and gently taking his book from him to make sure of his undivided attention, 'do you remember he had cultivated a beard and moustache? He said nature intended hair to grow on his face, and therefore he would not thwart nature by shaving. And I told him that if he wished to be consistent neither should he cut his nails, for nature intended nails to grow as well as hair, and he said I was an illogical creature. However, as he is clean-shaven now, he must have changed his opinion, though I daren't ask him why. What a dear, tiresome, argumentative little boy he was, to be sure! He could not so much as brush his hair or button his boots without giving you some excellent reason for doing it. I shouldn't feel life worth living if I had to give a reason for everything I did.'

'I believe you, my dear,' said her husband, laughing. 'Perhaps it would have been

better for you and Laurence if you could have been shaken up together and mixed a little, for you each have some good qualities that the other lacks. When your brother was last with us he thought he was not far from the kingdom of Heaven, feeling his way towards some bright discovery that should harmonise all the jarring elements of society. He has set himself a tough task if he thinks he can reform the world. Poor Laurence!'

'Poor Laurence? I should say, happy Laurence, to be capable of such faith and enthusiasm,' said Mrs. Stapleton. 'He is so single-minded and sincere, and he begins his reform in the only dominion any of us can lay claim to—the dominion of self. What an austere and simple life he leads, because he believes it to be right! If he rules nobody and nothing else, he is lord of himself. But, my dear John, why does he think that drinking water only, not smoking, and living mainly on cheese and apples is part of the

great reformation of society?' and Mrs. Stapleton fixed her soft brown eyes on her husband with an inquiring expression.

'I suppose, my dear, it is because Laurence holds that man has a spiritual as well as a physical digestion, and that on this simple and to us singularly unattractive diet his spiritual faculties are preserved at their best and brightest. For myself, I should die of indigestion on such fare, and the world would soon be deprived of my services.'

'Laurence thinks it is the will of God that he should live in this way,' said Mrs. Stapleton, gravely.

'That's a mark of your reformer in all ages,' said her husband emphatically. 'He can always tell you what is the will of God on any given subject, and by a strange coincidence it is usually identical with his own will. However, Norah, be sure to tell Mrs. Harter to have plenty of cheese and apples in

the house, and if she can find a chair more rigid in the back and more austere in the seat than another tell her to put it in your brother's room. I know his taste.'

'O John,' suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Stapleton in a despairing voice, 'I had quite forgotten that we have a dinner party to-morrow evening; you know, the Stoke-Pogeses and some other people are coming. How unfortunate! for Laurence hates a dinner party. I wonder what he will do.'

'Do? Of course he will behave like a gentleman and dine with us, or else eat cheese and apples in his own room; though I object to cheese in the bedrooms, it attracts the mice,' said John Stapleton, as though seized with housewifely fears.

'I doubt whether he will sit at table with us, at least not till dessert, when there will only be fruit. I know it disgusts him to see people eating meat. He says that when we eat flesh we are repairing ourselves with the

very material of which we are made, and that it is a very gross custom.'

John Stapleton laughed heartily. 'Would he rather repair himself by assimilating foreign matter, like the boa constrictor who swallows his blanket? Of all the far-fetched ideas — repairing ourselves with our own material!' and he laughed again.

'I could better understand his prejudice against animal food,' said Mrs. Stapleton, 'if it were founded upon a scruple about taking the life of any creature; but he has not named that as an argument against eating meat.'

'Oh, no; your brother has no scruples about taking life. He catches trout better than any man I know. But I must see Lane to tell him what wine we shall require for to-morrow night. The old port must spend twenty-four hours in one temperature after it is decanted, or I shall not dare to offer it to Sir Stoke.'

Mrs. Stapleton was ten years older than the brother in whom she took so vivid an interest, dating from the time when they lost both their parents, and she had been placed in a position of responsibility towards him, and had resolved that the little boy should never know the want of motherly love and care. Laurence had left Cambridge the year before, and was now living in London, but had not yet decided upon a profession, though his friends recommended a fresh one to him daily. So far he had only arrived at the negative stage of choice, in which a man knows definitely what he does not want, while his mind is a blank as to any definite idea of what he would like, or what calling might be suited to him. He would not take holy orders, he would not be a doctor, he disliked the Army, he was too old for the Navy, and he would not follow his father's profession of the Law. Laurence was ill to please in this weighty matter, and, though he

took counsel with his friends, it was merely for the pleasure of hearing them express their various opinions; he did not dream of following their advice. His mind was of a rigid and unaccommodating cast, governed by principles—his friends called them prejudices—which stand in the way of worldly success. The Bar would have suited him better than any other profession, but for one thing. On no theory could he satisfy himself that it was right to defend a man whom he knew to be guilty of a crime. An ancient work denounces, 'Woe unto those who justify the wicked for a reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.' And Laurence supposed that this denunciation would apply to him if he justified the wicked for a reward; in other words, if he took a fee for endeavouring to save a rogue from well-merited punishment. For the sake of bread-winning there was no need that he should adopt any profession whatever.

He had inherited ample means from his father, and was content with what he had, and was not anxious to set his pounds to work, begetting other pounds. To him money was simply and truly currency; a something to flow from his hand to the hand of another, and never to lose this flowing property in stagnant accumulation. So long as he could work at anything that he believed to be of use in the world, there was no spur of necessity urging him on to enter the overcrowded ranks of the professions, to occupy a place for which a thousand men, less lucky than himself, were scrambling.

Laurence Temple had a large heart, and was capable of strong friendship, and of what is more uncommon, of real love for his fellowmen collectively. In him this was no vague sentiment, no yearning after Russ, Turk, or Hottentot, combined with a definite hatred of his own countrymen, who might chance to differ from him in opinion. The fire of his

charity burnt brightest at home, and from the warmth of his affection for his brethren in England a kindly glow extended itself to the world beyond. He loved the upper and middle classes of Englishmen, with whom he had always associated; but when Laurence asked himself, 'What do I know of my poorer brethren, that I may love them also?' he was obliged to admit that he knew very little about them indeed. And how shall a man who knows only two out of the three estates that compose the realm imagine that he knows anything of the great globe itself, and all that it inhabit? He found it more difficult than he had supposed to gain any real knowledge of that mass of our countrymen whom, in contradistinction to the upper and middle classes, we call the lower classes of society. They are proud and exclusive, and view with suspicion a man who comes among them from a different rank of life than their own. But Laurence was undeterred by cold-

ness or rudeness, and resolved by such means as might suggest themselves to him to endeavour to gain some practical acquaintance with that body of his countrymen for whom all political parties express so much admiration on so slender a knowledge. While he was at Cambridge he had spent each long vacation lodging among workpeople in hideous manufacturing towns, living as they lived, and endeavouring to look at life from their point of view. Since leaving the University he had worked for a time in a cotton mill in a northern town. It was not work that he would have chosen for its own sake, but, having been taught no handicraft when he was a boy, he had to accept what he could learn most easily as a man. Nor did it matter at what he worked, since his sole object was to be among workmen as one of themselves, to gain, if it might be, a little real insight into their life and mode of thought. After he had become accustomed

to the ceaseless clack and rattle of the cotton mill, and no longer was aware of the permeating stench of oil, and had seen as much as he then desired of his fellow-workmen, he left the north to seek employment in London, this time as a humble beginner in carpentry. At several workshops where he applied, when the manager saw his hands he bade him be off about his business, telling him that men like him cost their employers more by their blunders than they could ever hope to make by their work. However, after much fruitless endeavour Laurence induced a cabinet-maker, for a considerable sum of ready money, to take him into his workshop and teach him his trade, or, to speak with exactness, to teach him as much of the use of carpenter's tools as he could learn in three months of steady application. In his sincere efforts to learn something about working men by associating with them, he approached his self-imposed task in a purely

receptive frame of mind. He was unprejudiced for or against working men as a class. He did not think them inspired with wisdom because they work with the hand more than with the brain, nor fit to guide the destinies of a great nation because of their numerical preponderance. He had neither theory nor hallucination on the subject. But Temple loved his poorer, less educated brethren, and it was this strong sense of brotherhood that made him forego the congenial society of cultivated men to live for months together among rough and often rude people, who for the most part regarded him with a mingled feeling of aversion and suspicion.

CHAPTER II.

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS.

'I quarrel with no man's tastes, nor would set my thin face against those excellent things, in their way, jollity and feasting.'—CHARLES LAMB.

THE sound of approaching wheels betokened the arrival of the first guests as Mrs. Stapleton entered the drawing-room, where her husband was standing gloomily on the hearth-rug, his back to the fire, and a coat-tail drawn under each arm, as a man is apt to stand who has the ordeal before him of a dull dinner-party in his own house. His wife had only time to say to him, 'I cannot think what has delayed Laurence,' and he to reply, 'We shall not wait for him. You forget that he always walks from the station, and that if he has a

heavy portmanteau to carry, and arrives late in consequence, he will be all the happier,' when the door was thrown open and Sir Stoke and Lady Poges were announced.

A little later, when all the guests had arrived, and were sitting at the dinner-table, the company was at first somewhat taciturn, and in the general silence a sound of noisy soup-swallowing was heard from the old naval officer, Captain Cox, and even from the more refined Mr. Newbury; for it is a license sometimes permitted themselves by those who would not for the world drink any other fluid audibly.

But a buzz of conversation very shortly arose, that would have drowned a louder sound than that of imbibing soup. Sir Stoke Poges was telling Mrs. Stapleton of the new stables and kennels he was building at Poges Court, and for her better understanding he sketched the front elevation of them on his stiffly-starched wristband. Lady Poges was

confiding to Mr. Stapleton that she came of a most unhealthy family, a fact that only to look at her one might easily credit. Mr. Newbury was inquiring of Mr. Scantlebury-Fox whether the new people at Buckley Grange were such as he might ask to his table. Mr. Carruthers was informing Mrs. Scantlebury-Fox that 'the forensic intellect finds it necessary occasionally to unbend;' while Captain Cox in a tremendous voice was telling the company generally that when he was a boy the wheat one year was diseased, and the bread made from it so bad 'that if you shied a loaf at the wall it stuck there, begad.' The nature of the assertion, and the tone in which it was uttered, caused all eyes to be turned in amused astonishment on Captain Cox. He looked fiercely round him and said, 'True, begad; done it many a hundred times,' and relapsed into silence, unconscious that his voice had made the room ring.

'We are expecting my brother this even-

ing,' said Mrs. Stapleton to Mr. Carruthers with a pleased smile.

'Indeed! I have not had the pleasure of meeting your interesting young relative since he completed his academical career at the University,' and he slowly turned his head and shoulders towards his hostess.

'Have you not seen Laurence since he left Cambridge?' said Mrs. Stapleton, unconsciously translating Mr. Carruthers' language into Saxon; 'but here he is to answer for himself,' and Laurence entered the room as she spoke. He kissed his sister on the brow, shook hands with his brother-in-law, and bowed to his friends generally.

'I must apologise for being so late,' he said.

'My dear fellow, we are not going to have you for a thirteenth at table. Don't imagine it for a moment. I will have no such ill-omened proceeding in my house. You may dine at a small table by yourself, where you

can overhear the conversation and see how happy we are; but you must not sit down with us.'

'Thank you, I'll sit anywhere, and I want no dinner, for Mrs. Harter gave me something to eat when I arrived;' and he seated himself on a low chair by the fire.

The mingled light of the wood fire and of the candles on the mantelshelf fell on his face, and threw the clear outline of his features in strong relief against the dark background of the oak wainscot. Laurence Temple was only four and twenty years of age, so that his face was marked with no long record of the past; but it spoke eloquently of the present. It was the face of a man whose inner life is his real life, and whose body is in subjection to his mind. A look of perfect health pervaded face and form, and his body appeared a fit dwelling-place for the clean soul within.

When the ladies had left the dining-room

Laurence came to the table, and, taking the vacant chair between Mr. Stapleton and Captain Cox, said:

'If no one has a superstitious dread of sitting down seven to dessert, I should like to join you now.'

His brother-in-law looked at him with a kindly smile. He was struck with Laurence's intellectual, eager face and spare frame, in contrast with the stolid faces and over-fed bodies of the other gentlemen present. He was like a greyhound among oxen.

'If I thought it would make me look like you, Laurence, I would adopt your diet at once.'

'In what does the peculiarity of his diet consist, may I inquire?' said Mr. Carruthers, whose great toe was at the very moment red-hot with gout.

'The peculiarity is this,' replied Mr. Stapleton, 'that if Laurence is living now

as he was a few months ago he takes neither meat nor wine.'

Mr. Carruthers slowly turned his large round head in its collar socket till he fully faced Temple, and said :

'In my profession such a regimen would be monstrous and impossible. The wear and tear of brain fibre is too great. I owe it to my clients to partake freely of animal food and of alcohol, that I may be the better qualified to discharge my duties towards them.'

'No doubt your profession is an arduous one,' said Temple with the modesty of a young man towards an old one, 'but I contrive to work hard on a diet that excludes wine and meat, and I am at least as strong as other men.'

'Well,' said Captain Cox emphatically, 'I shall go on eating meat as hard as I can, if it's only to keep the animal creation in its proper place. Besides, hang it all, the thing's a plain duty. The Almighty requires

us to kill and eat the animals, because if we don't they'll kill and eat us, and then there'd be a pretty how-do-you-do,' and he looked fiercely round the table in the hope of contradiction.

'Let me offer you a glass of port, Laurence,' said Mr. Stapleton; 'it is not an animal fluid like milk, it is a vegetable product, so you need not be afraid of it.'

'You almost convince me by your delightful sophistry,' said Laurence, laughing, and drawing a dish of walnuts towards him. 'But if I did drink port I doubt if I could properly appreciate it this side of five and forty years of age.'

'Don't you flatter yourself that you would be able to appreciate port wine even then, unless you serve an apprenticeship to it in your youth,' said Sir Stoke Poges, whose eyes shone bluer as his face became redder. 'It is a taste a young man cannot begin to cultivate too soon, and then it is possible,

though by no means certain, that at five and forty he may know something about it.'

Meanwhile in the drawing-room the ladies were talking with greater animation than they had displayed at the dining-table. Lady Poges had offered to copy Mrs. Newbury an infallible prescription for the cure of nervous headache, given to her by a lady who had known Abernethy, but who had omitted to state whether he was the author of the prescription or not, and, as the lady was now dead, the fact would probably remain unascertained. Mrs. Carruthers made no effort at entertaining, or at being entertained. She looked languidly around with a face expressive of the sense of vacuum under which she laboured when ladies only were present. She seated herself wearily in an armchair, and, taking refuge in the 'Illustrated News,' endeavoured to pass the time as best she could, while now and then an unmistakable yawn was heard from behind its

pages. Mrs. Newbury asked Mrs. Stapleton a great many questions about a tour she and her husband had lately made in France and Italy, but her chief curiosity was about the hotels they had stayed at, and the English they had met on their travels. For herself, Mrs. Newbury would not care to go abroad again. The continental Sundays were shocking, and the tower of Pisa leaned so, it positively made her nervous. Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Scantlebury-Fox discoursed together about fancy work with as much animation as either of them possessed, and Mrs. Cox promised to write to a married niece of hers for the pattern of a baby's sock, such as might really be relied upon.

Then Captain Cox's uproarious laugh was heard in the hall, and the gentlemen entered the drawing-room. At the first sign of their approach Mrs. Carruthers laid aside the 'Illustrated News,' seated herself afresh with more grace and less comfort, and resumed

her interest in life. She was too lethargic to flirt herself, she required to be flirted with, and, provided there was no younger lady present with the same predilection, she usually received the attention she demanded. This evening she was fortunate. Sir Stoke Poges was in high good-humour, and devoted himself to her for a quarter of an hour, though his voice was too loud and his manner too jocular to give her complete satisfaction. When he had left her, somewhat abruptly, Mr. Newbury took his vacant seat, and for the brief remainder of the evening she had the satisfaction of talking, and being talked to, in a mysterious undertone, a triumph no woman living could have achieved with the frank and jovial Sir Stoke.

At length, after a little music, to which no one listened, carriages were announced, and the guests departed, well pleased with their manner of performing social duties.

When the last carriage had driven away,

Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton and Laurence drew near the hearth, where, summer evening though it was, a wood fire was burning. Mrs. Stapleton turned the smouldering logs over with the tongs, and sent a bright shower of sparks rushing up the wide chimney. The ruddy light from the fire shone on her round white arms, and threw a warm glow on her sweet, animated face, and Norah Stapleton looked as lovely a picture of happiness and health as a man could wish to see. She turned with a bright smile to Laurence, and, placing a hand on each shoulder, drew him towards her, and gave him a sisterly kiss upon his mouth.

'Now, my dear brother, that these good, wearisome people are gone, let us sit by the fire and have a three-cornered talk together before we go to bed.'

'With all my heart. You and John shall take possession of the armchairs, as becomes your dignity, and I will perch on the music stool, and spin round and face you alternately.'

'Face Norah first, for I think she wants to find fault with you for not answering her last half-dozen letters,' said Mr. Stapleton.

'Oh no, I forgive you the moment I see you. But I did want to know what you have been doing since you left the cabinet-maker's. Let me look at your hands, Laurence. Are they getting hard and coarse, like a workman's?'

'Or like a fellow's in a university eight,' said her brother, turning round on the music stool and spreading out a pair of rather small but strong-looking hands for her inspection.

'Oh, what a cut this has been on your left thumb! And you have had a horrid pinch on this third finger nail! But surely all this roughness is not necessary, in addition to wounds and bruises, while there is glycerine in the world? You really could not offer a hand like that to a lady, Laurence.'

'My dear Norah, I have not the remotest intention of doing anything of the kind;' and,

looking critically at his hands, he was obliged to confess that his sojourn in a cotton mill, followed by three months at a carpenter's bench and a couple of months in a printer's office, had neither improved their texture nor their colour.

'Well, Laurence, and how are you getting on with your self-appointed task among your new friends?' asked John Stapleton as he lighted a cigar.

'Fairly well, I think. I expect so little that it would take a great deal to disappoint me. I have made some friends among the men I have worked with in different places, and a few very good fellows come to me five evenings a week to learn something about English literature and arithmetic.'

'Don't say that the same men come to you for instruction on five consecutive nights,' said Mrs. Stapleton, dropping her fan in her lap with an air of exhaustion.

Laurence laughed as he said, 'Don't be

afraid, my dear sister, of the British workman overstraining his brains. It is not the manner of him, and he is not driven to it, as we are, by competitive examinations. No, I have a sufficient number of friends among them to make up a class of a dozen or so nightly, without always seeing the same faces. Then on the sixth night we have a sort of talk, lecture, or whatever one likes to call it, on things in general, or the men argue on some subject of their own choosing, and we grow very warm over it; sometimes, I can assure you, there is even a tendency among us to clinch our argument by blows, as most of us are accustomed to use our hands more than our brains.'

'I confess I rather regret myself that one cannot resort to blows as an end of argument,' said John Stapleton, 'for if there is a thing I hate it is a man who won't see reason; it shows such a confoundedly obstinate temper. By the way, Laurence, I suppose you have

not been able to reason many of your working-men friends into your way of thinking with regard to smoking, water drinking, going without meat, and general indifference to luxury of all sorts?'

Laurence rose from the music-stool and paced to and fro in the room, as his habit was when he grew interested in the conversation.

'I have not attempted to make a single convert to my own opinions. Of course my friends may know my habits of life, if they care to do so, and to most of them they would probably be unattractive. But why, because I hold certain opinions, and regulate my life by them, I should therefore think them applicable to other men, and strive to make them think and act with me, I cannot see;' and Laurence stopped suddenly in his patrol, opposite a picture on the wall that he had known all his life, and looked into it as though he had never seen it before.

'Nevertheless, that is the usual motive

that takes a man like yourself among uneducated men. It is to do something at them, to them, or for them—to stop their beer, or their tobacco, or to interfere with them generally in any of the thousand ways that suggest themselves to one's love of benevolent tyranny.'

'That's quite true,' said Laurence, as he finished his inspection of the picture without having an idea of what he had looked at; 'that is quite true; and I am often told that, in living among workmen as much as I do without endeavouring to make proselytes of them, either to a political creed or to some pet hobby of my own, I am losing an opportunity.'

'I must say that I think this is true, Laurence, and that you do lose an opportunity,' said his brother-in-law gravely.

'I cannot see it. I go among workmen with as little self-consciousness as I went among my friends at Cambridge, and there it

was not said to me: "You are losing an opportunity in not trying to impress your own opinions on your friends." I go among workmen because I have a strong regard for them, and am deeply interested in them, and they teach me in various ways quite as much as I can teach them. And, speaking of politics, for instance, I am not clear that it is fair to require from uneducated men their unknowing adhesion to a belief I have only attained to by thought and knowledge.'

'All that is very noble, my dear fellow, but it strikes me as unpractical; for, while you from conscientious motives abstain from exercising your just influence over men as yet incapable of forming their own opinions, worse men than yourself have no such scruples, and do not hesitate to make tools of the ignorant for their own purposes.'

Here Norah Stapleton rose with an ill-disguised yawn, and, shaking hands with her brother, said, 'If you are going to talk poli-

tics, my dears, I will leave you to it, and wish you good-night,' and, waving her hand to her husband, she left the room with a light laugh.

'To return to what we were saying,' said Laurence, when he had closed the door after his sister and taken possession of her vacant chair. 'You are right in saying that unscrupulous men make tools of the ignorant for their own purposes. So far as I have any influence with uneducated men, instead of trying to impress my own opinions on them, I endeavour to set them on cultivating their powers to the point at which it is possible for them either to form an intelligent opinion for themselves or to judge of the value of those that are offered to them ready-made by others.'

'I see we should not think alike on this point,' said John Stapleton, as he threw the end of his cigar into the fire. 'I frankly admit that I view the working class as so many possible voters, and the only influence

I should care to exert over them would be to bring them in masses to the poll to swell the Liberal vote.'

'I see you take the usual view of them. There is one thing, my dear John, for which I heartily pity working men, and that is for belonging to a class that is looked upon as a happy hunting ground by every man who rides a hobby. Think what they suffer from men cleverer than themselves who are always at them. Radicals, Tories, Socialists, Blue-ribboners, and what not, all besiege them, many of them appealing to them by arguments they dare not offer to educated men, and that would be an insult to an intelligent baby.'

'There again, Laurence, you seem to condemn yourself for not using your influence over your uneducated friends by appealing to their reason for some definite good object, such as the spread of Liberalism among them, for instance.'

'He who would teach others must himself be a believer,' said Laurence, 'and I regard all political schools with too much indifference to have attached myself to any particular one. I have voted both for the Liberals and for the Tories by way of expressing my sympathy with the whole round of English political thought. For it seems to me that to label oneself Liberal or Tory for life one must shut one's eyes to every aspect of a question but that favoured by one's own party, and a narrow, one-sided view of wide subjects would be the result. It is true we require our party leaders thus to stultify themselves, but I cannot see that we of the rank and file are called upon to perform such an intellectual sacrifice. No doubt your party man on either side despises me, but I retain my freedom of thought, and can afford to be looked down upon. Viewing politics as I do, you see why it does not seem to me of the slightest importance how working men may choose to vote, or whether they

vote at all;' and Laurence, who had walked the room like a quarter-deck while he was speaking, stood still opposite his brother-in-law's chair, and fixed his bright eyes on him.

'Such indifference as yours to the politics of the working classes ought to make you a very happy man,' said Mr. Stapleton; 'for my part, I am often profoundly troubled by my anxiety about it,' and he rose to wind up the moderator lamp, that was burning dim.

'I should be anxious, too, my dear fellow, if I thought that politics could give to working men the one thing that I think they stand in need of most, and that is more sympathy and expansion of heart, and less pride and class prejudice.'

'Certainly politics won't help them to that,' said Mr. Stapleton with a short laugh, 'and I'm afraid we are all rather narrow in our sympathy, and confine it a good deal to our own class.'

'I am also afraid that is true; but, so far as I

have seen, this narrow class feeling is stronger the lower one descends in the social scale. One sees a hearty brotherly feeling at work between the upper and middle classes of Englishmen, and they intermarry freely, which is the surest sign that they consider themselves in all essentials as equals. Thus class is fused with class, as it ought to be throughout the social scale. But very rarely indeed does the upper or middle class intermarry with the lower or working class.'

'And why the deuce should they?' asked Mr. Stapleton briefly.

'They should marry out of their own rank to break down those wretched class prejudices and hatreds which are deepened and perpetuated by always intermarrying among people of precisely their own standing, and handed down in an intensified form from one generation to another.'

'I cannot see how marrying out of one's sphere should promote kindly feeling between

different classes. The few unequal marriages I have seen have produced quite a contrary effect, and have caused a great deal of bitterness and irritation,' objected Mr. Stapleton.

'No doubt in isolated cases this might be so, but let it be tried on a sufficiently large scale, and I maintain that the result would be wholly beneficial. If men of the upper classes married yet more commonly than they do into the middle class, and we men of the middle class married into the working classes, it would weld all ranks and orders of men together with links of human affection. The man of rank or of wealth could not look down on the untitled and the poor, to whom he would be closely related. And the poor man could not think himself despised when men of ancient and wealthy families chose their wives from among his daughters. Then the children of such marriages, being at once of gentle and simple blood, would have the kindliest feeling towards the two classes to

which they owed their parentage, and would inherit good qualities from both. Only try it on a large enough scale, and I verily believe that by trusting to the strength of those human ties which God has made necessary to us, and courageously linking all grades of society together by marriage, in a few generations the whole nation might be united in kindly affection, like one vast family;' and Laurence's large grey eyes expanded as though they beheld a vision.

'A dream, my dear Laurence, a dream, and one that does more credit to your heart than to your head. But, supposing that your idea were possible, you are hard on the middle-class man in requiring him to marry into the working class. Between the upper and middle classes there exists no real barrier, they are equally well bred and equally well educated; there needs only a little silly pride to be thrown aside to make marriages between them as general as you could wish. But imagine a

cultivated man, like yourself, for instance, married to a working-man's daughter, no doubt a very worthy creature, but ignorant of the small refinements, courtesies, and amenities of life, which grace a home, and to which we have always been accustomed in our wives and daughters. She would speak bad grammar in a cockney or a provincial accent, would trample on your mental corns every hour of the day, and would not possess one idea in common with you. A man like you, fastidious in taste and keenly appreciating all womanly delicacy and refinement of feeling, if you were married to a woman who was bound to rasp all your finer sensibilities, would be driven frantic. You would become unjust and cruel to the poor thing, whose only offence would be that you had put her in a false position.'

'But if a man of culture made this kind of marriage, in order to prevent the misery you

describe, he should choose his wife young and impressionable, and train and cultivate her by his own standard.'

'But you forget, Laurence, that girls of the lower orders are grown up sooner than they are with us. They are more experienced in certain ways, and know a great deal that young girls of the upper classes, who lead a sheltered life, are ignorant of. I think it would be a tough task to educate your young wife. Two are needed to this bargain. The woman must be as willing to learn as the man is to teach, and even then the result may not be satisfactory. But I'm sleepy, and you ought to be; the clock in the hall has struck one. And I say, my dear fellow, don't air any of these notions to Norah; I think they annoy her very much. You and I can discuss all the theories in the universe and never dream of translating our ideas into acts. But you know women are so practical, and she would

live in a constant panic, expecting you to practise what you preach.'

'You are an old cynic,' said Laurence, smiling, and the two men shook hands warmly and went their several ways upstairs.

CHAPTER III.

HELEN WENTWORTH.

HELEN WENTWORTH was the adopted child of Sir Stoke and Lady Poges, and the daughter of a younger sister of Lady Poges's, who had made a disastrous marriage with a consumptive ne'er-do-well, though she atoned for it as soon as possible by dying at the birth of her baby. The unfortunate infant was very shortly fatherless as well as motherless, and forlorn must have been its lot if a visible Providence had not come to the rescue in the shape of the uncle and aunt, who, being parents that had lost their babes, were moved by a babe that had lost its parents, and thought, by taking the little girl home with them, to patch up a family out

of the survivors of two households. And an odd family triangle the uncle, aunt, and niece became, for by no stretch of imagination can three persons be aptly said to compose a family circle. The three had not a point of resemblance between them, and were held together by the walls of the house they dwelt in rather than by affection, or by any particular pleasure they found in each other's society. The little girl was always treated kindly, but in a narrow and unsympathetic spirit. Lady Poges believed that the society of other children was too stimulating a pleasure for Helen to partake of, except in homœopathic doses, and diluted largely with the company of older people. She had a theory that an only child need never be a child at all, except in the matter of tender years; that if it associated solely with grown-up people it would unconsciously imbibe their ideas, imitate their gravity and dulness, and, in short, if kept from the contaminating society of

frivolous beings like itself, would develop into the spiritless prig, which was Lady Poges's *beau idéal* of 'a good girl.' But she could not make Helen's practice fit in with her theory. The child had an irrepressibly cheerful and high-spirited temper, that enabled her successfully to resist her aunt's system of education, and, beyond a little old-fashionedness of manner, and occasional quaint turns of speech, there was nothing about her to suggest that her bringing up was different from that of other children.

Laurence Temple first met Helen Wentworth when he was a youth of eighteen and she a little girl of fourteen, under circumstances that often amused him to recall. It was when he was at Coombe Delaway for the first time after his sister's marriage, spending the Christmas holidays there before he went up to Cambridge, and he was out covershooting in the oak woods with Martin, Mr. Stapleton's gamekeeper. It was a mild day

in January, and a soft breeze rustled the few brown leaves that still clung to the bare boughs. Under foot the fallen leaves of many autumns thickly covered the damp soil, and through the network of branches overhead fell gleams of pallid sunshine, and flecks of blue sky were seen. Suddenly, from among the withered bracken, in an opening in the cover, there rose a cock pheasant with glittering breast and long golden-brown tail feathers. A mild beam of winter sunshine fell with soft glory on the metallic lustre of his plumage, and Laurence fired into the ray of shining light, and the bird, but now revelling in the joy of life, dropped to the earth dead, his gay feathers bedabbled with his blood.

The keeper strode knee-deep through the bracken, and picked up the bird. 'Dead as a door-nail, and not a bone broke, nor a feather turned! That's a shot as Mr. Stapleton hisself would ha' been proud to a' fired;' and Martin held up the pheasant by the leg,

the better to admire the neatness of its death wound under the wing, a sight that gave him more pleasure than the beauty of the living bird had ever afforded him.

But a most unsportsmanlike, though purely natural, feeling of revulsion had come over Laurence. He could not but be struck by the sudden contrast between the innocent, joyous life of the bird one moment and, the next, its utter extinction for his own amusement's sake. He had thoroughly enjoyed firing the shot that had done its work so well, and many a pheasant had suffered before for him to attain his present skill without his giving a thought to it; but, now that he had painlessly killed his bird, questionings rose in Laurence's mind for the first time.

'Martin,' he said, 'I wish I had not shot that bird.'

'What the devil maggot's got into your head now, Mr Laurence?' the keeper said

when he could speak for astonishment. 'What's come over you of a sudden?'

'I really don't know, Martin; I never felt it before,' and the boy wiped his moist brow as he spoke. 'I love shooting, and yet I wish I'd not killed anything so beautiful.'

'Oh, it's because he's beautiful that you're sorry you've shot 'im, is it?' said Martin, slowly turning the dead bird over in his hands, and looking at its lustrous breast with his head inclined critically to one side; 'because he's a beauty! Any rational man would ha' said that was a reason for killing 'im. But if it's ugliness you're after I can find you ugly things in plenty, from water rats to rooks, to keep your hand in.'

Laurence laughed at Martin's argument, and then said, 'Think what you will of me, I'm sorry that for my sport I've taken the life I can never restore.'

'Who the devil said you could restore it?' said the keeper, fairly carried out of himself

by the boy's whimsical perversity. 'Dead is dead, for all I can see, and ever was, and if you wants to order it different it's flying in the face of Providence, and you'll get bit for your pains. Why,' he added, for he liked the lad, and could not bear to see him adopt dangerous principles without making an effort to save him, 'it's a pleasure to a bird to be killed by a shot like yours. It's just the same for him to drop dead in a trice, with his crop stuffed full o' corn, as it is for an old gentleman to fall asleep in his armchair of a sudden with his inside full of a good dinner.'

Laurence laughed heartily. 'You forget, though, Martin, that your old gentleman goes through the same performance every evening of his life; but, even if it be, as you say, a pleasure to the bird to be shot, still it's a final pleasure, and he can't look forward to a repetition of it. Hullo! what's that?' he added before Martin had time to reply, as

the wood suddenly rang to the howling of a dog.

'Only one of them trespassing cusses got caught in a trap, and serve 'im right,' said the keeper as they both ran towards the spot whence the howling proceeded.

The cause was not far to seek. A foolish young spaniel was caught by the hair of his foot in a trap, and, instantly giving himself up for lost, was making known his woes with the maximum of noise and the minimum of pain. His mistress, a girl of fourteen, knelt by his side, equally abandoned to grief, though of a more self-controlled kind. As she saw Laurence and Martin approach she rose and ran to meet them, and begged them, with streaming eyes, to save her dear Fido, who was being tortured to death, she was sure. The young girl was dressed with a simplicity verging on shabbiness, but there was a refinement in her speech and in her every movement that caused Laurence to raise his hat to her, and Martin

involuntarily touched his cap, though his manner towards trespassers was not usually conciliating.

'You've no call to be afraid, Miss, the little varmint's more frightened than hurt. I know the sort. Keep on yelping a whole blessed day through if you tread on his toes, casual like, with a hob-nailed boot;' and Martin set his foot on the spring of the trap and opened it, and away sped the frightened spaniel, leaving behind him a tuft of hair caught in the steel teeth.

Laurence laughed at the instantaneous disappearance of the dog, and, turning to the little girl by his side, said, 'You will have to find your way home without the company of your dog. But how did you get into these woods? They are private and enclosed. Do you know that you are trespassing'—and his eyes shone with laughter—'and that all trespassers will be prosecuted? Mr. Stapleton might set the whole machinery of the law in

action against you, though you are a young lady, for the law is no respecter of persons.'

'You can't frighten me, because I am innocent,' said the young girl, while her colour came and went in a way that belied her courageous words. 'Besides, my uncle is a magistrate, and will not let Mr. Stapleton's machinery do me any harm. And I know all about the law, too, and if I have committed a crime my uncle will bail me out, for I've heard him use those very words;' and her voice grew so tremulous that Laurence, unwilling to amuse himself at her expense, said reassuringly:

'I think a first offence is almost always overlooked. But you must let me lead you out of the woods to the comparative safety of the Queen's highway. Here, Martin, carry my gun home. I am going to take charge of this young lady. Now, can you jump?' he said, as he led her towards a stout wattled fence, 'for this is the shortest way to the high road.'

'Of course I can jump, or how could I have got into these woods?' and she cast a rueful glance at a large three-cornered tear in her dress as she spoke.

'But what should make a young lady wish to jump into a wood?' asked Laurence, laughing.

'I did not wish to jump. I came against my will. It was in this way. You know when you take a young dog out for a walk he is really taking you all the while, and you never know where you may have to follow him, or what will happen. So Fido wriggled himself into the wood through a hole quite low down in the fence, and was most disobedient and naughty, and wouldn't come back to me when I called him. So I was obliged to climb the fence and jump into the wood to follow him, for he is my aunt's dog, and I am responsible for him.'

'And who is your aunt?' asked Laurence with the directness of youth.

'My aunt is Lady Poges, and Miss Milner, my governess, took me and Fido for a drive in the pony carriage, and I asked her to let me get down for a run; and then Fido left me and wriggled through the fence, and I had to follow him, and that is how it all happened. Ah, there's Miss Milner!' she said, as they came in sight of the high road and of a pony carriage occupied by a lady looking about her in all directions with a distracted air, 'and, better still, there is dear Fido sitting on the seat beside her. Have you such a thing as a pin about you? Miss Milner would be so shocked if she saw this great tear in my frock;' and Helen lifted her handsome, frank, brown eyes to Laurence as she spoke.

Luckily, he was able to produce a pin from some secret recess of his waistcoat, and, asking his young companion to stand still, he offered to pin up the unsightly rent in her simple skirt.

'Oh no, thank you, give me the pin.

Boys don't understand pins. I beg your pardon—you are a boy, are you not?'

'I really don't know how to answer your question till I know what your definition of a boy may be,' said Laurence, smiling, and offering her a pin, point foremost, like a spear.

'There; don't you see, you have nearly pricked me. Pins should always be offered head foremost. Well, by a boy I mean a person who still goes to school,' and she looked fixedly at him with frank, inquiring eyes.

Laurence blushed under her gaze as he said, 'Then I must be a boy, for I have one more term at school before I go to Cambridge.'

The young girl noticed his heightened colour, and, thinking it rose from the humiliating confession that he was still a boy, said earnestly, 'Oh, never mind, you can't help it, you know, and I like boys very much. I shall ask my aunt to bring me to see you sometime if you live near here. You have been so good to Fido and me that I feel very friendly—don't

you?' and again she looked at Laurence with unabashed innocence.

'Oh yes, of course, I feel very friendly indeed, and when you come to see us my sister will give you some peacock's feathers, and——'

'Is your name Stapleton?' interrupted the little girl.

'No, my name is Temple, Laurence Temple, at your service when Fido or you get into trouble,' and he made her a little bow as he spoke.

'And my name is Helen Wentworth, and I shall tell my aunt what a nice boy you are, and how you saved Fido's life and helped me out of the wood;' and, having said good-bye, without waiting for him to accompany her, she ran across the field to the road, where Miss Milner sat in the pony carriage, wildly beckoning to her pupil.

Laurence watched them drive away, and he smiled as he saw Helen lift Fido on her lap

and cover the young spaniel's tattered locks with kisses and caresses.

It is six years since Laurence came to the little girl's help in the wood, and Helen has grown into a bright and lovely young woman, with enough of her childish frankness remaining to give an added charm to her more dignified manner. Time has not lessened the affection and admiration with which Laurence inspired the little girl, and he on his part would not feel that he was happy at Coombe Delaway if he did not see Helen very often. And yet he was not in love with her, though if he had seen her now for the first time, instead of meeting on the established footing of old friendship, he might have viewed her with very different eyes.

Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton were great friends and admirers of Helen, and her uncle and aunt, who kept her strictly at home, and refused all invitations for her, relaxed their severity in the case of the Stapletons, and

occasionally allowed her to spend a few days at Coombe Delaway. It was a matter of wonder to her friends that Helen's spirits were able to resist the depressing influence of the life she led at Poges Court. Since Sir Stoke and Lady Poges decided that the top stone was laid on that superficial structure, her education, she had been promoted to the post of companion to her aunt, who was an exceedingly trying person to live with. Often the young girl wished herself back in the schoolroom, where at least she had enjoyed the society of an intelligent woman, and where a succession of tasks kept time from hanging heavily on her hands. Lady Poges was fond of her niece, but it was in her own way, and her way was one calculated rather to irritate than to gratify the object of her regard. She did not show Helen the caressing kindness that a warm-hearted girl loves to receive from one who stands to her in the place of a mother, and yet she expected de-

monstrative affection and gratitude from the niece she had adopted. Lady Poges was an invalid, who through sheer limpness of mind and body had taken to ill-health as a profession, and the contemplation of her varied symptoms afforded her an inexhaustible source of gloomy satisfaction, while the treatment of them provided her with occupation. Where symptoms are constantly looked for and expected, the least they can do is to make their appearance punctually, and certainly they could not develop themselves in a more appreciative victim than Lady Poges.

Helen was well acquainted with the order in which the symptoms occurred that were so faithfully recorded, and she never failed to express due sympathy when she was told, for the hundredth time, of the extraordinary sensations that ran riot in her aunt's meagre frame. She knew exactly when to expect the morning bulletin which stated that the patient's head was hot on one side and cold

on the other, while both her feet were like ice. Later in the day sensations as of water running down the back, and sudden contractions of the scalp, were solemnly notified. Before luncheon and dinner a strange sinking and hollowness of the stomach was announced in a thin voice from Lady Poges's couch, while after meals the symptoms were reversed, and a sense of fulness was complained of in the same region. At half-past ten at night the final bulletin was issued, announcing an abnormal condition of drowsiness and fatigue—'Not ordinary fatigue, my dear—I wish I could think it were so; and, as to my sleep, it is more like a prolonged fit of insensibility than anything else I can compare it to.'

The poor woman had suffered much, but her sufferings were so complicated by whims and fancies that it was difficult to know where the bodily ailments left off and the mental oddities and humours began. If Sir Stoke sometimes felt tired by his wife's querulous

and unreasonable temper, he remembered the little graves where her three sons and her only daughter lay buried, and he had no feeling towards her but that of compassionate forbearance. For himself, he had outlived the grief of the loss of his infant children. His life was full of healthy interests, and his natural temper intolerant of everything painful and incapable of brooding over the irrevocable. Such elasticity of mind as Lady Poges might ever have possessed was crushed out of her in the early years of her married life. Not only was there the definite sorrow in the death of her children to bewail, but in course of time she added to it a further and an imaginary grief. As none of her little ones had lived long enough to give token of any kind of character or disposition, it was always open to her to believe that the world had lost in her sons a Shakespeare, a Newton, or a Pitt, and that in her infant daughter society had been deprived of a Miss Gunning

or a Mrs. Somerville, according as she inclined at the moment towards beauty or astronomy. Into her niece's ear these wailings chiefly were poured, and Helen was given to understand that she was where she was owing to a mysterious Providence that had taken her cousin Alethea to itself in long clothes; that if Alethea had lived she would have made a brilliant match at sixteen years of age, and then possibly Helen might have been allowed to wait on her aunt in her agreeable bereavement, though never as an adopted daughter, never. It was a hard life for a young and high-spirited girl to spend day after day, shut up with an invalid who had no sense of humour and an inveterate horror of fresh air, so that mind and body alike languished in her society. Helen sat hour by hour in a room with closed windows and a large fire, while her aunt lay on the sofa under a fur rug, surrounded by her pet dogs, whose barking never agitated her

nerves, though the voice of her husband or her niece was often more than she could bear.

The days spent at Coombe Delaway were Helen's red-letter days, anticipated with eagerness, and looked back upon with fond regret. But those visits were happiest and fullest of life and enjoyment when Laurence Temple happened to be there; and, though he now seldom spent more than a few days at Coombe Delaway, Mrs. Stapleton always contrived that her friend and her brother should meet during his brief visit. For deep down in Norah Stapleton's heart, and also most transparently in her conduct and conversation, she wished that her beloved brother should marry Helen Wentworth. Happy wives are inveterate matchmakers. It is a practical form of thanksgiving for their own fortunate lot that makes them wish to play the part of Providence in arranging the affairs of their young unmarried friends. Of course the woman did not breathe who was worthy of her brother; but, looking

at it as a matter of favour and not of desert, the handkerchief might as well be thrown at Helen—nay, had better be thrown at Helen—than at any other young lady of their acquaintance. Helen Wentworth had youth, a warm heart, bright spirits, abundant intelligence, and more than her share of good looks, and a fortune in prospect as the adopted niece of Sir Stoke and Lady Poges. Helen and Laurence frankly showed the pleasure they felt in one another's society. The Pogeses beamed complacently upon their friendship, and for their part were quite willing that it should ripen into something warmer. Mr. Stapleton, too, would give the young people his blessing, should it come to a match between them ; but he reminded Norah that, after all, a man likes to choose his own wife, and at least to imagine that he is a free agent in a matter that concerns himself more than anyone else.

'You must be careful how you let Laurence see your desire about Helen. If you

offer the most charming girl in the world to a man, the chance is a thousand to one that he will refuse her.'

'Ah! but not as I should do it! I will offer Helen to Laurence as imperceptibly and irresistibly as you force a card. He will think that he has the choice of the whole pack; but let him draw which he will, it shall be none but my queen of hearts.'

'I don't doubt your intention, Norah, I only doubt your sleight of hand. Don't set your dear little matchmaking head on a marriage between these two. You will spoil all by over-anxiety, and frighten Helen away from the house, and that you would regret.'

To Mr. Stapleton it seemed so natural and so probable that Laurence and Helen should fall in love with each other that he was content to leave it to whatever power presides over the easily kindled affections of young creatures of fitting age and mutual attractions who are thrown in one another's society.

Laurence had now been at Coombe Delaway several days, and yet he had not called on his friends at Poges Court. He and his sister had been for a walk together, and he entertained her with many a quaint little history of his adventures in pursuit of practical knowledge. Mrs. Stapleton was thinking her brother was slightly mad, though very delightful, and that if he married Helen Wentworth it would be the best way to cure him of his visionary ideas, when, as they were approaching the house, the being that of all others then filled her mind appeared in sight. Helen and her uncle had called at Coombe Delaway in the course of their morning's ride, and, finding no one at home, they turned their horses' heads about, and were riding down the avenue at a foot pace when they met Mrs. Stapleton and Laurence. Laurence was not thinking of Helen till her bright presence recalled her very pleasantly to his mind ; but Helen had been thinking of

him the whole ride from Poges Court, and when they met her face shone with an unmistakable radiance of delight.

'Good morning, Mrs. Stapleton; we are very lucky to meet you when we had given up all hopes of seeing you to-day. I thought you would be glad to hear that Lady Poges is not materially worse for the effort she made to dine with you, and I have brought Helen over with me to show you the Arab mare that I have chosen for her. We should have Helen losing her bloom if I did not make her ride a good deal. She stays indoors too much with her aunt. Lady Poges likes her rooms rather warm, you know—rather warm,' and Sir Stoke inflated his broad chest as though he were laying in a store of fresh air to take home with him.

'It does your taste immense credit—she is a lovely little animal. What's her name?' said Mrs. Stapleton.

'Sultana; and she really deserves the

title, for she belongs to the aristocracy of horses, and has a pedigree longer than my own;' and Sir Stoke looked admiringly at the little chestnut mare, but Mrs. Stapleton regarded the rider.

Helen was slightly bending forward in the saddle, talking to Laurence, who stood beside her, patting Sultana's sleek neck. Her manner was at once sweet, and gentle, and animated, and she glowed with the beauty of happiness. Her young face was a mirror, in which her thoughts and feelings were clearly reflected, and as Mrs. Stapleton saw the beaming eyes that looked down upon her brother she thought, 'If he does not read their meaning, it is because he does not know the very A B C of love.'

Helen's heart bounded within her when she heard her uncle accept Mrs. Stapleton's invitation to luncheon, and she turned Sultana's head again towards the house. Laurence helped her to dismount at the

porch, and Mrs. Stapleton and Sir Stoke went into the cool shade of the hall, but the young people preferred to walk to and fro on the terrace. Laurence walked with his hands loosely linked together behind him, and his head slightly drooped. Without being strictly handsome, his face was interesting and attractive. His light grey eyes were so eagerly expressive that at times when he was silent he looked as though he spoke. His lips were inclined to be thin, but moved with such pleasant curves that they conveyed no impression of coldness or severity. His whole expression was eager and penetrating, but kindly, and the gravity of his appearance was tempered by a very winning smile. A tame peacock advanced to meet Laurence on the terrace, and when he saw that a stranger was present to admire him he made a fantastic display of his tail for Helen's entertainment.

'Argus has the instinct of hospitality very strongly,' said Laurence, smiling, 'and he

feels he must do something to uphold the dignity of the family. He takes the utmost pains to entertain a guest.'

'You have often made me very happy with feathers from Argus's glittering tail, but you must give me no more,' said Helen, with a little deprecating air; 'in fact, I must return every feather you have given me to you and Mrs. Stapleton.'

'This is mysterious; pray explain it to me, Helen.'

'It will be a poor explanation when all is said, but still I must do as Aunt Marian bids me. Mrs. Scantlebury-Fox called on us a week ago and saw my beautiful feathers, whereupon she told my aunt that it was an undoubted fact that she would never enjoy good health so long as we had a single peacock's feather in her house, no matter how obscurely it might be hidden away. So I must return you all those pretty feathers that you gave me.'

'I wish I had had half an hour's start of Mrs. Scantlebury-Fox's legend with Lady Poges, and I would have impressed a contrary superstition on her mind. I would have told her of S. Barbara, and how the cruel arrows turned to peacock's feathers, since when they have borne healing on their wings. But, if it is necessary to your aunt's peace of mind, to say nothing of her welfare of body, that the house should be stripped of peacock's feathers, pray bring them here, and come as often as you can to see them. I should like to think that there was a permanent attraction in the house that would bring you here very often;' and Laurence smiled at Helen, who still looked to him like the little girl of six years ago, in spite of her more graceful form and dress.

'What a pity that you cannot always wear a riding habit!' he said, as he noticed to what perfection it displayed her slim young form.

'I would gladly wear it for six hours a day, if I might.'

'But I mean what a pity it is that you cannot wear it indoors, and always!'

'Ah! it would make me so restless. Directly I have my habit on, I long to mount Sultana, and be off and away for a gallop, and hear the wind singing in my ears, and feel the sweet rush of it in my face.'

'Do you know, I always think of you as in the open air,' said Laurence, with a sidelong glance at his bright companion. 'You are associated in my mind with air, and sunshine, and out-of-doors life.'

'How tenacious of first impressions you must be!' said Helen as they turned at the end of the terrace. 'You always think of me as you first saw me, trespassing in the woods. I could wish I had met you under more dignified circumstances than with a torn frock from climbing a fence, and crying because my dog was caught in a trap.'

'Wish nothing different. I liked your torn frock (did I not help you to mend it?), and I liked your distress for the young spaniel's imaginary hurt. A very pretty picture of it all remains in my mind.'

'Well, you shall keep that picture in your mind if I may keep my picture of you. I do not associate you chiefly with the open air. On the contrary, I think of you as indoors, standing by the piano while I play to you, and trying very hard and conscientiously to detect the difference between the "Blue Bells of Scotland" and "Rousseau's Dream";' and Helen shot a bright glance at Laurence, full of merriment.

'I did not think you were so cruel, Helen, when I am away and unable to defend myself, as to associate me in your mind with one of my worst qualities—my entire absence of musical ear.'

'But is it not true?' she asked, her brown eyes full of light and laughter.

'True? Of course it is true, and that is the painful part of it. And yet, Helen, though for me musical instruments need never have been invented, you cannot say I have no music in my soul. I love to listen to the sigh of the wind, to the rustling of leaves, the flowing of water, the song of birds, and the flutter of wings. All these sounds are to me the perfection of music, and fill me with as deep delight as you can feel in listening to Handel or to Beethoven, and my pleasure is one that is free to all; it needs no special culture to enable me to enjoy it. Have I proved my case?' and Laurence looked at Helen eagerly.

'Yes, I think you have proved that you have a strong natural feeling for music. But I assert that I am richer in my capacity of enjoyment than you are. For, while I share with you a love of the grand and beautiful sounds in nature, I have also a delight in the musical creations of human genius, and that

is a feeling of which you know nothing. I have the double delight of appreciating the music of art as well as the music of nature.'

'Yes, I admit that you are richer than I —that you possess a source of pleasure and strength that is denied to me.' Then, lifting his head, for he had been looking at the ground while he spoke, he said, 'But there is compensation for me in my loss. If I do not enjoy musical sounds, neither do I suffer from inharmonious sounds, and you would find it very difficult to jar my nerves by noise and discord.'

'Happy man! I wish you could impart your secret to me! You do not know what I suffer from the barking and howling of dogs at Poges Court. But here comes your brother. How glad I am to see him!' and Helen hastened to meet Mr. Stapleton, who had walked down the steps from the open window of the dining-room, and was approaching them on the terrace.

'I am delighted to see you, Helen; but why do you and Laurence keep luncheon waiting? It grieves me to interrupt a *tête-à-tête*, but the fact is, I am extremely hungry, and I have only a limited time in which to gratify my appetite,' and he led Helen by the hand into the house.

At luncheon Helen noticed that Laurence ate vegetables and drank water only, and she did not like it, for it made her feel as if there was something gross by contrast in her cutlet and glass of claret. If he had cared to explain to her his reasons for his abstemious diet, he could have made a convert of the enthusiastic young girl on the spot. But Laurence was himself so little impressed by men's theories and personal habits that it never occurred to him to commend his own practice to others.

During luncheon Sir Stoke and Mr. Stapleton discussed a recent violent assault on their gamekeepers by an organised gang of poachers. The men had been taken and had

up before some magistrates in the neighbourhood, who were not personally interested in the case, and committed for trial at the next assizes.

'What a fine-looking fellow Reuben Heathcote is, the leader of the gang! I should uncommonly like him for a gamekeeper when he has had twelve months in gaol, and had the nonsense taken out of him,' Mr. Stapleton said.

'He'd rob you of your game most confoundedly,' said Sir Stoke, shaking his head rapidly.

'Very probably, but he would allow no one else the same privilege, and he has a consummate knowledge of the tricks and roguery of poachers. After all, a good gamekeeper is only a good poacher turned inside out, and *vice versâ*.'

'I deny that there is such a thing as a good poacher,' said Sir Stoke firmly.

'I wish there were no such thing as game-

laws,' said Mrs. Stapleton; 'they cause a great deal of crime and misery.'

'You mean the breaking of them does, my dear lady—the breaking of them does.'

'You'll never make my wife understand your meaning,' said Mr. Stapleton, regarding Norah with an amused expression of despair. 'She is absolutely immoral on the subject of the law. When she hears of a law being broken, instead of wishing to educate men to the point of self-control at which they will keep the law, she is for bringing down the law to the level of the poor dear law-breaker, and making everything agreeable for him. Confess, my dear, that there is truth in what I say.'

'I believe there is,' said Mrs. Stapleton, laughing. 'Ah, well, I am glad I am an irresponsible person, and that I am not one of the law-makers of the land.'

'No one can be more thankful than I that you are not, my dear. If the world were

governed by you good women, it would rapidly become a very wicked world.'

Laurence laughed, and, turning to Helen, said, 'Do you agree with my brother, or are you one of those who think that if women helped to make laws we should have better government?'

'I can't agree with Mr. Stapleton that we should make a very wicked world of it, but at the same time I don't wish for women to help to make laws and to govern the country.'

'May one ask, why not?' asked Laurence with a gravity that Helen thought verged on mockery.

'Oh yes; I will tell you gladly. I think that where men with all their experience have failed, it would be presumptuous if we women with our lack of experience supposed that we could do better.'

'That is very well said, Helen,' Mrs. Stapleton remarked cordially. 'Men have governed the world from the beginning, and

see what a mess they have made of it! With all their ability and administrative powers, they have not reduced one single fraction of this globe to perfect order. Confess as much, Laurence.'

'I am not prepared, my dear sister, to commit myself to any such far-reaching assertion. But I agree with Helen that where men have failed in their own special department women in their place could hardly be expected to do better.'

CHAPTER IV.

TIM BALLINGER

The last long vacation before leaving Cambridge Laurence Temple spent in that smoke-canopied part of Staffordshire known as 'the Black Country,' in the hope of gaining a little knowledge of ironworkers and their ways. He had obtained an introduction to a well-known firm of ironmakers in the town of Smokington, and at his special desire it was arranged that he should pay his first visit to the works at night. For Temple had been immensely impressed by the weird effect of light and shade as he looked across the black waters of the canal that lay between the high road and the works, and watched the forms of men flit to

and fro out of the darkness of night into the ruddy glare of the fires. There was a great fascination in seeing the dark outline of the 'puddler' as he swayed and bent himself to his work at the mouth of the open furnace. When Laurence wished to acquaint himself with the art and mystery of the processes carried on in the works, he would study them carefully by daylight; but at present he was absorbed in the pictorial aspect of the place, in watching a scene unlike any he had ever beheld before.

As he stood endeavouring to accustom his eyes and ears to the glare and din around him he started aside at the noise of wheels, and two men rushed past him drawing a truck loaded with a glowing mass of ore, taking it from the fire to the big hammer, under whose resounding blows the tortured iron shed molten tears and flashed vindictive sparks. Flaring jets of gas flickering in the night air afforded a strong, coarse light round the

centres of work, and flung deep shadows beyond the narrow space they illuminated. In damp weather when the clouds hung low the burst of light from the fires was reflected in the sky in a widespread glow of dull red, which was instantly swallowed up in darkness as the furnace door was shut with a slam. Laurence watched the wonderful effect of the strong red light struggling with devouring darkness. Now the glare of fire prevailed, and he could see the features of the men at work as clear as at high noon; then the glow died out and night settled down upon the scene, except where it was held at bay by the coarse light of the gas. The ground vibrated, and the air echoed to the rhythmic thump of the big hammer, that formed a steady background of heavy noise to the frequent rattle and clang of bars of iron thrown on the reverberating iron pavement—to the unknowing eye a scene of confusion and bewilderment bordering on the infernal, but in reality full

of order and method, each process complete and beautiful in itself.

Laurence, who usually observed men more than things, was struck by the appearance of a fine, strong man working in the red glare of a puddling-furnace, and watched with admiration the strength and skill with which he manipulated the mass of molten metal in the fire. The man worked it to and fro in the ardent heat with a long 'puddling'-bar, pushing, turning, and doubling it up with as much apparent ease as though it had been a lump of dough, and gazing intently all the while into the dazzling white core of the fire, that Laurence could only bear to look at from a distance and with shaded eyes. When the bar with which he worked the molten ore grew unbearably hot to the touch, he threw it aside in a tank of water, took a cool bar in its place, and continued to 'puddle' the iron till it was of the right consistency. Then with a powerful pair of tongs the puddler

drew the glowing mass from the heart of the furnace and set it on a low, two-wheeled truck, and it was borne rapidly away to the great hammer, throwing out light and heat on its fiery passage. Then the man's work was over for about half an hour, when another 'heat' of iron must be puddled, and he sat down at a little distance from the furnace and wiped his streaming neck and face. His spell of work had only lasted some twenty minutes, but Laurence had never seen more strenuous labour compressed into so short a space of time. Strong as he was, he felt that he should have fainted from the mere heat of the furnace, and it was explained to him that you must begin young to accustom yourself to the fire; a man cannot take to it when he is grown up.

'How does Vulcan refresh himself after his labours?' thought Laurence as he watched the puddler. First the man took a deep draught of oatmeal and water from a large jug standing on a bench near him, and then

he reached a book out of the pocket of his coat, hanging from one of the supports of a shed near the furnace, and sat down to read under the flaring gas-light. Laurence, who was standing near him, courteously asked him what he was reading. The man looked up at him for a moment with an expression that asked, 'Who the devil are you?' but, meeting a pair of eyes as frank and fearless as his own, he relented instantly, and handed Laurence the book by way of reply. It was a well-thumbed copy of Euclid.

'Have you anyone to help you with this?' he asked.

'No,' replied the puddler, with a short laugh; 'I must potter it out for myself.'

'Would you rather do that than be helped?'

The man took off his white cotton cap, turned it slowly round in his hands, and put it on again before he spoke. 'I shouldn't mind being helped a bit to make it out, but no chap here knows anything about it.'

'Let me help you,' said Temple.

The puddler looked at him from head to foot.

'Don't I look like a chap that can help you?' he said, smiling.

'I wasn't thinking about that, sir. I was thinking it's a rare friendly offer, and I'll take it.'

'What spare time have you, then, that we may begin at once?—for I am only staying a few weeks in the neighbourhood.'

'I'm on the night turn this week, sir, but any day-time after two o'clock, when I've had my sleep and my dinner, I could come to you.'

'Then will you come to me to-morrow afternoon?'

'I will, sir. Next week I work days, so I shan't have no time to speak of.'

'Well, let us make sure of the present. Here is my name and the address of my lodgings,' said Temple, writing quickly on his card. 'And your name?'

'My name's Ballinger—Tim Ballinger.'

There was something about the man that was very attractive to Temple. His face was plain but powerful, his deep-set grey eyes clear as glass, and his large firm mouth had a mild expression that softened the ruggedness of his features. Tim Ballinger was not taller than Temple, but he was thick-set, and immensely developed about the chest and shoulders. He was apparently about thirty years of age. He was a Staffordshire man, and spoke with the accent of his county. The first few times that Tim Ballinger came to Temple he applied himself to his studies with an expenditure of mental force that would have been unnecessary if he had been taught how to use his powers. The correctness of his arithmetical calculations was astonishing, but they were worked out at a needless expense of brain wear and tear, because he was acquainted with no formula to guide him. Ballinger gradually lost his

shyness, and his reserve melted away before the warmth of Temple's kindly manner. Chance had thrown together two men formed by influences the most widely dissimilar, yet bearing this strong underlying resemblance in character, that each regarded a man as a man, and not merely as a gentleman or as a working man. Ballinger felt the superiority of his new friend, but in no oppressive sense. He looked on Temple with admiration, a man perhaps endowed by nature no more highly than himself, but with his mental powers cultivated, and his faculties bright and keen with exercise. Ballinger loved to hear Laurence talk of politics and social matters from a wide human point of view, and without passion or abuse. He was at first puzzled by his new friend's capacity for seeing more than one side of a question. Laurence was the first man he had known who could do that, for the influences surrounding Tim Ballinger all his life had been of the narrowest and

most sectarian character. Yet his mind was inclined to be fair and tolerant, and he was able to recognise in Laurence Temple a man with the heart of a brother.

One fine Sunday afternoon early in their acquaintance, the two young men went for a long walk together, and Tim grew confidential, and told Temple the simple story of his life. He was left an orphan young, one of three brothers who had to shift for themselves from a very early age. He had lost sight of his brothers long ago when they went after work in the Glasgow iron district. Neither of them could write; he had heard nothing of them, and did not know if they were alive or dead.

'How came you to be better educated than your brothers, Tim? You write well enough,' said Laurence.

'If I do, sir, it's because I felt the miss of it more than they did, for I learned myself. I never had no more schooling than just to take my A B C and put it in a bit of order like.

I learnt to write when I was a biggish lad, and it was the hardest work I ever done, excepting reading. Reading and writing, sir, is wonderful things. What gets over me about 'em is this—you might look at me till you was black in the face trying to make out what I was thinking on. Well, I takes a pen and writes on a bit o' paper, and what's that but my thoughts put in form before your eyes? I don't know nothing half so queer. Yes, sir, I learnt myself to read and write; I done it all by scowl o' brow, and stiffish work it was. I was a big lad afore I could read to call easy like, and it comes over me when I see the little wench spelling her A B C from the book.'

'Who is the little wench?' interrupted Laurence—for Tim was not married; it could not be his little girl—'Who is the little wench?'

A delighted grin overspread Tim Ballinger's rugged face as he answered, 'Why, the

little wench is the little wench, and I couldn't love her more, bless her little heart, not if she was my own flesh and blood, I couldn't. She's child of a mate o' mine as had worked with me nigh seven year. Garbett, Bill Garbett, his name was, and we'd walked together into Wales when trade was bad, and got a job there. But wages was lower there than here, and we couldn't get on with the Welsh folk, so we tramped back into Staffordshire. We worked in the same works; he was a shingler, and me a puddler. His work was to take my puddled ball and put it under the hammer till all the dross and rubbish was scaled off it like, and it was beat into a block same as you seen it done i' these works. I never see a better workman nor Bill, never. It was a pretty sight to see him a-working the ball under the hammer. He'd turn it as soft as a mother turns a sleeping baby in the cradle, and yet he'd put it so as the seven-ton hammer came down every

instant just on the spot he wanted, true as a line. He played like wi' that hammer. He'd set it so as it 'ud bring its seven ton down like a feather on his watch-glass without cracking it. Aye, poor fellow, he'd a jokin' way with him, he had; he used to say as the big hammer know'd him.'

'And is he dead?' asked Temple, noticing that Ballinger spoke in the past tense.

'Dead! Dead ain't the word. He was smashed. He was as sober as I am now, but his foot slipped and he fell forrard, and the big hammer come down on his curly head and crushed it, same as you crush a beetle under your heel.'

Temple realised the horror so completely that he felt a momentary sensation of physical sickness.

Then Tim Ballinger continued in his usual slow, quiet tones: 'When we'd cleaned up, and throwed a bit o' tarpaulin over him, and stopped the hammer, as was thundering on like

the devil, one on us said, "Who'll go and tell Garbett's wife?" for he'd a young wife at home, and she was near her time with her second child. "I'll go," says an old chap called Joe Merrit, "for I can break bad news very gentle." "Get along sharp then," I says, "and mind you do it;" and away he cut to Garbett's house, running as if the pavement burnt his feet. When he got there Garbett's wife was cleaning the window, so she nods very friendly, and says, "Good morning, Mr. Merrit. What's up? You seem in a hurry," she says. And he just says, "Is your husband in?" And she says, "No," and turns quite white. And he says, "Well, I didn't hardly expect to find him at home, for he's got killed in the works, but you mustn't put yourself about." The poor thing gave a skrike Merrit said was horrider than seeing Garbett killed. She wasn't long after him. By that time next day she was laid dead, with a dead baby by her side. We buried 'em all three together on a

Sunday afternoon, when his mates could go, and I don't think as there ever was such a buryin', not in the Black Country. Hundreds o' folk come miles to see it, and the public-houses was that busy they couldn't draw fast enough for 'em. But it's one thing to go to a buryin' for fun like, and another thing to go when you see your best friend put under-ground. So as I come away out o' the jostle o' folks standing ten deep round the grave, swarming up each other's backs to get a look at the coffins that was none o' theirs, I thought to myself, "What 'ud my mate like me to do if he was 'ere to ask?" And I thought as how he'd like me to take to his little wench. So I picked her up on my way back and took her home with me—a pretty little chattering bit of a thing o' two years of age, and now she's my little gal, and the mother sees to her.'

'The mother! Who's the mother?'

'Oh, she's a rare good old woman. Her man and both her sons was killed in a colliery

explosion when me and Garbett was working in Wales ; so when we come away I brought her along with me into Staffordshire, to live with me and see to my bit of a place, for she'd no home of her own, you see.'

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to Tim Ballinger that he should offer his home to the homeless, and share his all with the penniless. Temple looked at the man and loved him.

'But weren't wages very low when you took to the mother?'

'About as low as could be; but I'd summat and she'd nothing, so the fairest way was just to share it. Besides, it don't take much to keep an old woman. They've more tongue than teeth, you see,' and Tim laughed, and continued, 'She works very nigh as hard as me. She washes, and cleans, and cooks for me and little Polly, and ain't, taking one week with another, more down than you might expect.'

'You have a family ready made, Tim. I don't think you've left room in your house for a wife.'

Tim laughed uproariously. It seemed to him that there might be a joke lurking somewhere in Temple's remark—where, he could not be sure, but it was a kind of mental equivalent to a dig in the ribs—so he laughed accordingly.

'Mr. Temple, I won't disguise from you that when you take an old woman into your house you cut off your chance of bringing a young one in. I had my thoughts of marryin' once, same as any other young fellow. It was my mate's sister, Polly Garbett—her that the little wench is called after. She was a little pretty bit of a thing, seemingly too delicate for me. She wasn't like the girls about us. How she come among us, God knows. Well, He took her, and the daisies has grown over her these ten years. And I've come to that, as I'd rather think of my girl lying there

like a buried snowdrop than 'a seen her live to get worn and werritted wi' hard work and children. So I've took my mind off the women, you see, except a very young one like the little wench, and an old 'un like Mrs. Brimer,' said Tim, with a smile and a sigh. 'I look on the little wench same as my own child, and she shan't have no stepmother—leastways, not till she's big enough to give it her back again if she munched her.'

Temple laughed at the terms in which he expressed his consideration for the little wench, when Tim said abruptly, as though in continuation of a train of thought:

'I'll tell you what I envy you gentlemen for;' and he looked earnestly at Temple, and thrust his hands deeper into the side pockets of his coat.

'Do; I should like to know what strikes you as enviable, for I think you are a particularly contented man.'

'Well, then, I don't envy you for your

money. There's many of you works hard enough to get it, and for them as has it from their fathers without working for it themselves, why, they're lucky chaps, is all I can say. I know I wish my father had left me thirty shilling a-week, but he'd 'a had to save it first, and that wasn't in his line. But what I envy you gentlemen for is your wives,' and Tim's voice grew soft and gentle. 'If I came home nights to a pretty little creature with shining hair, and a soft voice, and little white hands, I shouldn't feel no work too hard, nor no day too long, when I'd that to look forward to when it was over. And p'r'aps when you was a bit tired she'd tune up and sing you something soft and pretty like,' and the forgeman heaved a sigh. 'That's where you gentlemen has the pull over us working chaps, sir, more'n anything. You ought to be good men with them bright-eyed, soft-speaking ladies always with you. I suppose,' said Tim with a sidelong glance at Temple, and

a certain diffidence of manner, 'I suppose among your sort there ain't no beating of wives? I've thought, when I've heard them speak so soft, they don't look the sort as a man could bring his hand down on.'

'No gentleman would be so cowardly as to strike a woman,' said Temple warmly.

'Then how do you chastise her when she's main aggravating?'

Temple thought for a moment, and said, 'I suppose if a gentleman had any serious cause to be displeased with his wife, he would speak to her on the subject.'

'Well, sir,' said Tim, 'if your tongues is as sharp as our women's, your wives 'ud be drove to use their fists sometimes, if you wasn't.'

By this time Temple and Ballinger, after a five miles' walk, again entered the dismal town of Smokington, on the outskirts of which stood the iron works. Tim's home was a quarter of a mile away on the other side of the town, where a few stunted trees made

believe to put out their leaves in the spring, and patches of grass and weeds growing round the base of undisturbed heaps of 'slag' made what the Black Country children fondly imagined were 'fields.'

'You see,' said Ballinger, pointing to the distant hideous row of blue brick cottages, in one of which he dwelt—'you see, when I took to the little wench, me and the mother couldn't live close to the works no longer. It's a goodish step for the old woman to bring my dinner to me; but you must live in the country with young uns—they'd ought to have summat green to look at. I used to live down Sykes's Alley, by the chemical manure works. It did well enough for me, but it ain't fit for the little wench—and the language there of a Saturday night! You know, sir, little uns picks up all they hears, and I should 'a had my pretty little wench rapping out curses as quick as you spits out cherry stones.'

'Do any of the masters live among their men in the noise and smoke of their own works?' asked Temple, noticing the uniform meanness of size and appearance in the houses of the town.

'Not exactly, sir,' said Ballinger with a slow smile. 'If they did we should be better friends all round. But I don't blame 'em for not coming to live in a stench and a row that I've moved out of myself. No, the only gentlefolks we've got among us is those that makes nothing out o' the works and factories here, and that's the parsons. God knows what we should 'a done when we had the fever but for the parsons. There was no place too filthy for them to go to, nor no disease too catchin' for them to visit. I tell you, sir, when we was dying like rotten sheep, the parsons was our best friends, and what they did for the widows and orphans is past telling. Just let me hear a chap speak agin our parson,' and Tim shook his big fist

menacingly. 'I go by what I sees. When we'd the fever here I called the parsons the black-coat soldiers, because they was always at the post o' danger. One on 'em took the fever among our folks and died, and we give him almost as good a buryin' as Bill Garbett, but not quite. Why, if there ain't little Polly coming to meet her daddy!' and Tim's face broadened into a grin of delight as little Polly Garbett came running towards him down the slope from the house. She was a solidly-built little maiden of about five years of age, her arms and legs were exceedingly rough and red, and her round rosy face lived a long way up a large lilac print bonnet that projected far beyond her snub nose. Tim caught her up in his arms and swung her on his shoulder.

'Show the gentleman how tall you're growed; you've got to duck ever so to get i' the house,' and, stooping to avoid striking the child's head against the top of the door,

Ballinger entered his house and asked Temple to please to come in.

Temple found himself in a snug little room, the picture of simple comfort. The table was drawn up opposite the fire, and loaded with a sumptuous Sunday afternoon meal. Temple did not then know what a forgeman's appetite is, so that he beheld with astonishment the dish of cold boiled ham, a jar of pickles, a pork pie, a plate of hot buttered crumpets, shrimps, watercress, bread and butter and cake, with a large block-tin teapot presiding over all.

'Tea's ready, Mr. Temple, and me and the mother'll take it very kind if you'll sit down with us. That's Mrs. Brimer, as I call the mother;' and Temple shook hands with a tall, lean old woman of severe appearance, whose small grey eyes, clear as a wind-swept sky, looked as though they had shed their last tear. Laurence Temple saw at a glance that Mrs. Brimer was a woman of character,

and she perceived that he was a gentleman, and was gratified that Tim had brought him into the house at a moment when the amply-spread table bore witness to her powers of housewifery.

Meanwhile little Polly had become aware that a stranger was present, and made violent efforts to hide her face on Daddy Tim's shoulder, which only resulted in crumpling the front of her stiffly starched sun-bonnet.

'Don't let the child rumple up her Sunday bonnet i' that way,' said Mrs. Brimer sharply.

'I can't undo the strings, mother, my fingers is too clumsy;' but Temple leaned forward and untied the strings for him, and, taking off the vast cotton bonnet, revealed a comely shock of light curls on the little maiden's head.

'Won't you give me a kiss for taking off your bonnet?' asked Laurence.

But Polly, feeling she was now able to

burrow her face in Tim's coat, resolutely turned the back of her head to him.

'Don't you take no notice of her,' said Mrs. Brimer; 'Polly's that contrairy. If she thinks you wants to kiss her she carries on i' thaten, but if you leave her alone she'll come and kiss the nose a'most off your face.'

Temple soon saw the truth of the old lady's observation. Little Polly resembled some Pollies of a larger growth in that she liked to absorb the undivided attention of one person at a time, and just now she was in full possession of Daddy Tim. She sat on his knee taking deep draughts out of his tea-cup, and helping herself to pork pie from his plate. When Tim came to a morsel that looked particularly appetising he put it into the little wench's mouth, and then she waxed tyrannous and capricious, pretended that she did not want it, and smacked Daddy Tim on the face, and kissed the place to make it well again.

This delighted Tim amazingly, and he had eyes for no one but the sparkling coquette on his knee. When little Polly had dealt him a stinging slap on the cheek, and was kissing him afterwards with more than usual vehemence, he looked across the table with proud delight and said to Temple, 'Ain't it a little woman all over?' But when Daddy Tim stroked Polly's red cheeks and arms he felt that something was wrong, and wherever he kissed her she presented a stimulating harshness of surface, and, as he stroked her rough little knees, on which he could have struck a match, he said with a troubled look, 'Mother, ain't the little wench's skin gone choppy like?'

The little wench threw her pinafore over her face, while Mrs. Brimer said, shaking her head, 'Aye, it is, and when you've said choppy it isn't the worst by a good deal It's a naughty little gel, that's what it is. She takes and messes with the pump i' the back yard as soon as my back's turned, and gets caddlin'

and splashin' i' the water all over her arms and legs, and dries 'em in the cold wind. You see, Mr. Temple, she's that deep she comes over me and Daddy Tim, as she calls 'im, thro' being a' orphan. She knows as I can't beat dead folks' childer, leastways not hearty like so as to do 'em good, so she puts on her old granny.'

'Do you 'ear that, Polly? You're a naughty gel,' said Tim, and Polly lifted up her voice and wailed under the shelter of her pinafore.

'Oh Polly, you'll frighten the gentleman!' said Mrs. Brimer.

'Leave her be, mother; her feelings is hurt.'

'That's Ballinger all over,' said the old woman to Temple, casting a loving glance at Tim as she spoke. 'He allays feels for them as is weak or in trouble, if it's only for a naughty little gel. And if he wasn't like that where should I be now? That man came to

me when my feelings was hurt, past healing, I doubted. An old woman isn't to every young man's liking, not even when she's bright and happy. But oh, Mr. Temple, Ballinger took to me when I was an old woman with a broken heart; God in heaven reward him for it, he did, and he's been better to me than them as is dead and gone, than my own poor lads as was crushed i' the pit.'

'Ballinger would tell you the obligation is not all on your side,' said Temple, deeply moved; 'you keep his home sweet and comfortable for him.'

'Aye, so she does,' said Tim heartily. 'A man by hisself 'ud be a poor thing.'

'Whoever 'eard of a man by hisself, if it wasn't the man in the moon?' said Mrs. Brimer with energy. 'You know as well as I do, Ballinger, that if I hadn't lived wi' you, and made you a deal more comfortable nor what a young woman could do, you'd 'a took and married long ago. Young women is poor

giddling things. You can't look to 'em like to old uns. So long as a young man's single, I says, he knows where he is; but when he's married he don't know where he is, nor how many he may become.'

It was Mrs. Brimer's one haunting fear lest her good Tim Ballinger should marry, and she should lose her happy home with him and the little wench. She lost no opportunity of assuring Tim that he was much better off with her than he could possibly be with a wife; and, by constantly hearing her repeat this assertion, Tim came at last to believe it might be true.

'Tim 'aven't had no excuse for marrying,' continued the old woman. 'It's only them poor wastrels as has no old woman to do for 'em as is like drove into marrying. That was the way with Brimer. He'd no mother nor nobody to see to him, so he took and married me; but my poor lads, they'd me to see to 'em, and it 'ud 'a been ridiculous for 'em to

'a married. No, they neither of 'em never thought not of no such a thing.'

And Temple reflected that he had met with mothers in a different rank of life from Mrs. Brimer's who also flattered themselves that they knew every thought in their children's hearts.

'Perhaps you would allow a man to marry late in life?' asked Temple.

'I've nothing to do wi' that, sir. They say there's no fools like old fools. All I say is, as for young men to go marrying young gels is a disgrace to 'em when they know better. I don't think much o' marriage myself. The minister come to see me the other day' ('She's one of these 'ere Baptists,' said Tim, by way of explanation, speaking with his mouth very full, and nodding sideways in the mother's direction), 'and he says, "Oh, Mrs. Brimer," he says, "don't you say nothing against matrimony, if you please. I 'ave enjoyed the marriage state with two

excellent partners now in glory, and I've faith to believe as the Lord would raise me up a fourth if my present good lady was took." "Well, Mr. Huggins," I says, "you that lives in the pulpit feels you must practise as well as preach, but us as 'as our lot cast in the pews don't need to set no example." "But, my good Mrs. Brimer," he says, "if everybody was of your way o' thinking there'd be no marrying nor nothin', and the world 'ud die out." "And no great harm i' that," I says, "so far as I can see. This world's none of our making, and I can't see as we're obligated to keep it agoing."'

A loud rap on the door delivered by the hardest of knuckles here broke in upon Mrs. Brimer's discourse, to Temple's regret.

'Come in,' shouted Ballinger, and the door was opened by a powerful, thick-set man, wearing round his neck the forgeman's inevitable white woollen comforter.

'I say, Ballinger,' he said in a rough tone,

'be sure and come to the meetin' to-morrow night. I've been round now and seen a lot of our chaps, while you was out pleasuring, and there'll be a devil of a row.'

'All right, I'm coming.'

'Then mind as you do, that's all,' and the man, who had kept his hat on and taken no notice of anyone in the room except Ballinger, went out, shutting the door after him with a slam.

An uncomfortable silence fell on the little company. It was first broken by Mrs. Brimer, who drew herself up with dignity, observing, 'Bill Anslow don't make no study of his manners, seemingly. For all the notice he took o' me, I might 'a been a mad dog i' the place.'

'He's secretary to our union here,' said Tim to Laurence; 'he's a clever chap, but thinks nobody knows nothing but hisself. I'm thinking I shall have to help at making the row myself to-morrow night,

for him and me don't see together over this here business. He wants to strike and I'm agin it.'

'Do you expect to be in a majority at the meeting?' asked Temple.

'I don't hardly know; Anslow's such a beggar to talk. He twists the chaps round his fingers like, and it's no good argufying with him, you're sure to be beat. So after I've told him plain and straight why I thinks contrairy from 'im, and why I think we should be worse nor fools to go on strike now, I don't argue nor nothing, but every time he gets up and blethers away, I gets up too and says firm and quiet, "I don't 'old with you." I keeps on like that, in partikiler when he's give us a bit o' fine talk, and looks round for the chaps to clap 'im, I gets up and says, "I don't 'old with you." It riles him above a bit,' and Ballinger's eyes twinkled as he spoke.

'Perhaps you'll let me know how the

meeting goes off. Don't get into a row if you can help it, Tim, but I shall side with you any way, for I don't like the look of that fellow.'

'Ain't that judging by appearances?' said Tim, smiling at Temple.

'And what else is there to judge by, I should like to know?' said Mrs. Brimer sharply. 'You can only go by a man's outside. He can't take and show you his inside to see if that 'ud please you better. I don't like Anslow's looks myself, and what's more I can tell he don't like Ballinger. Tim, my lad, that man 'ud do you a mischief if he got the chance.'

'Come, come, mother, don't talk i' that way;' and Laurence, to comfort Mrs. Brimer, assured her as he bade her good-bye that Tim seemed to him a man in every way able to take care of himself.

'And now will Polly kiss me?' he added, taking the little wench's fat hand in his.

And Polly, finding that Daddy Tim's exclusive attention was withdrawn from her, leaned forward in his strong arms, and put up a chubby face smelling of bread and butter and yellow soap for Laurence to kiss.

CHAPTER V.

A COMPACT.

'I expect my dog to be treated with all the respect due to myself. . . . I call him my *test*—the touchstone by which to try a friend. No one can properly be said to love me who does not love him.'

'Excuse us, dear sir—or madam, aforesaid—if upon further consideration we are obliged to decline the otherwise invaluable offer of your friendship. We do not like dogs.'—CHARLES LAMB.

WHEN Laurence Temple left Cambridge, and he and his two most intimate friends, Thomas Borradale and Richard Norton, were about to part and take their several paths in life, the three young men entered into a solemn covenant. They pledged themselves within two years from that date to pass a month together in some retired spot in the country, for the sole pleasure and profit to be derived

from each other's society, and the said month to be spent in simple and frugal living.

A triple friendship is a difficult thing to manage. Two strands of the threefold cord are apt to twist themselves very firmly together, and to leave the third to grow slack, and the friendship of Temple, Borradale, and Norton was no exception to the ordinary rule. Temple and Borradale were more intimate with each other than either of them was with Norton, but each in the absence of his particular friend was content to put up with the society of Norton. By degrees the two friends, having freely used Norton as a stop-gap, advanced him to a higher post, and admitted him into their friendship. Not to its full confidence and love, for David cannot have two Jonathans, nor Jonathan more than one David, but to a relationship pleasant to all three, and by the genial kindliness of Temple and Borradale rendered worthy of Norton's acceptance.

In the covenant entered into by the three

friends merely spoken promises were not enough for Borradale. He was destined for the law, and, to show his zeal for his future profession, he drew up a whimsical agreement between himself, Temple, and Norton in parody of a legal document. 'I will give you each a copy. I shall charge you nothing for it,' he said airily; 'you can keep it till I am Lord Chancellor, and then it will have an historic value of its own.'

Borradale enjoyed himself exceedingly in drawing up the absurd document, in the preamble of which he stated: 'that the three hereinafter mentioned high-contracting parties agree to spend one calendar month in each other's society before each, any, or all, of the said, &c., &c., should be settled in life by marriage or death.' Each of the high-contracting parties kept a copy of the solemn deed or covenant signed by himself and his two friends.

Laurence Temple had almost forgotten

his share in the agreement, when one morning at Coombe Delaway he received a letter from Borradale recalling it vividly to his mind.

He wrote: 'You and Norton have barely three months before you in which to escape the guilt of perjury. I am sailing in September to visit our Australian colonies, and, as I shall be away a whole year, your only chance of keeping your promise will be for us to spend this coming month of July together. Do not think that I injure my professional prospects by so long an absence from England. My own private opinion is that what I am pleased to call my prospects will not suffer by my taking a holiday when I like, or for as long a period as I like. But I am a man of my word, and will not run the risk of either of you forgetting our solemn mutual engagement. The deed or covenant lies before me as I write. 'Tis a masterly document, Temple. How clearly it defines our abode as "tenement, messuage, or the

like," the time we spend together "such term or period as shall not exceed one calendar month, as shall be agreed upon by the hereinaforesaid high-contracting parties!"

'Then our mode of living, "a rigid frugality and simplicity of diet as to comestibles and beverages," and the final clause of the document which concerns me vitally, and which I drew up as with my very heart's blood, "That during the said term or period of sojourn or residence, &c., &c., in our domicile or place of abode, no female of the human species, old, middle-aged, or young; widow, wife, or maid; having black, brown, red, or fair hair, for her garniture; whether of high or low degree, fair or foul, rich or poor, fat or lean, be allowed, permitted, or encouraged to approach, enter, or tarry within the said domicile or abode during the said term or period," &c., &c. And that "during such term or period the said high-contracting parties shall carry on and maintain any inter-

course or correspondence with grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, or other female relatives or acquaintance respectively wholly and solely by means of the penny post as by law established, to the total exclusion of all personal meeting between the said," &c., &c.

'That last is essential to me, and, as it is indifferent to you and Norton, I shall exact the fulfilment of it to the letter. I saw Norton the other day, and he is afflicted with a melancholy, which, I trust, will prove as brief as it is deep. He has had a luckless love affair, but is quite ready to join us on July 1. Our quarters will be a small cottage at a pretty little out-of-the-way place near Shelton, in Shropshire. The cottage belongs to my old nurse, Anne Haggart. My poor father gave it to her out of sheer joy of heart when, after she had nursed my seven sisters, I, the lone lorn son of the house, appeared upon this scene. Anne wished to stay and minister to us, but I have explained to her that we

must have the place to ourselves. As she has adored me, and abjectly obeyed me since the hour of my birth, she gave way at once, and will vanish from the cottage the day before we arrive, leaving everything in the perfection of order and cleanliness. Therefore, meet me at Shelton station at four o'clock on the afternoon of the 1st of July.

'Trouble me with no letters in the interval, when you have once assured me that you can meet me, for I shall not have time to open them. You know our family by repute. At the present moment it consists of my maternal grandmother (on a visit only, thank the bountiful heavens!); my mother; her two unmarried sisters, also, thank heaven! only on a visit; my eldest sister, who has the misfortune to be a widow, and her two little girls (we are feminine to the third and fourth generation); my other six sisters, and myself. I give you my word of honour that the butler, the retriever, and I are the

only male creatures in the establishment. Now you know why I am determined to visit Australia, where, as yet, the male population is in a glorious preponderance.'

'What are you laughing at, Laurence?' said his sister as they sat at the breakfast table. And for a reply he read her the latter part of Tom Borradale's letter.

'Did you ever know of a man so unlucky as to have seven elder sisters?'

'My dear Laurence, it would be much worse to have seven elder brothers. Imagine a young man sat upon and kept down by seven imperious elders of his own sex. King David would have had something to say on the subject, I am sure.'

'And yet, Norah, in old stories, King David's included, it is always the youngest son who is the lucky and fortunate one,' said Mr. Stapleton.

'A kind Providence then takes pity on his desperate condition, and intervenes to save

him from his elder brothers, and he comes to good fortune in spite of them, and not because of them. I think Borradale is very lucky. He must be the prophet who has honour in his own house, and the comfort of constant worshippers. If he is a man who rides a hobby, think how he can prance and curvet before his admiring womankind! But when do you and your friends go into retreat, Laurence?'

'On Monday next Borradale wishes me to go to Shelton.'

'What! are you leaving us after only a few days' visit? And you have not yet called on anyone; you have not even been to Poges Court. I am sure Lady Poges and Helen will wonder why you have not been to see them.'

'Then I will call this afternoon. I should be sorry not to see my friend Helen. She is the only lady, except you, my dear sister, that I am privileged to call by her Christian name, and who calls me by mine. There's

the advantage of having known each other before the conventionalities set in hard and fast.'

At five o'clock in the afternoon Laurence Temple stood in the porch at Poges Court, enjoying for a minute the shelter from the glare of the sun before he rang the bell. A visitor at Poges Court found himself in the same case as Christiana and Mercy when they knocked at the wicket-gate. The first sound of the bell was answered from within by a hideous babel of barking. The baying of a bloodhound supplied the bass of the chorus. Above his deep notes was heard the rapid, staccato bark of a fox terrier, while the air was sustained in a piercing treble by the yapping of a couple of Skye terriers.

'Down, sir, down! Ha! would yer?' and the sharp crack of a whip, that changed at least two barks into one howl, gave eloquent proof that the mistress of the house was not at home. Then the door was opened

a couple of inches by a melancholy-looking servant, endeavouring to stem the torrent of dogs that rushed forward, eager to sniff the visitor.

Lady Poges was not at home, but was expected every moment, and Temple entered the house to await her return. The dogs having thoroughly examined the visitor, and judging favourably of him, instantly forgot his existence, and rushed headlong before him into the drawing-room. When he entered the room the bloodhound was stretched on the sofa. In each armchair a Skye terrier was turning rapidly round and round to find a soft place to lie down on, and the fox terrier was impetuously tearing up a bed for himself in the fur hearthrug.

'If you like, sir, I'll take the whip to 'em again, while my lady's out, but it ain't no manner of good,' said the melancholy servant.

'Leave them alone; at least they are quiet now,' said Temple.

But as he spoke, wheels were heard, and a carriage drove up to the door, and Bomba, the bloodhound, vaulted off the couch, upsetting a small table in his flight, Nip, Tip, and Pim following in the rear, barking a clamorous welcome to their mistress, as though all pandemonium had broken loose.

Lady Poges did not come into the drawing-room at once. After a two hours' absence from home, she had so much to tell the dogs, and in return they had so much licking and sniffing to do, that Timmins must fetch a bowl of water for her mistress to wash her hands in, and then brush the fox terrier's white hairs from her dress, and all these observances took time. Helen did not wait for her aunt, but, pushing Bomba, Nip, Tip, and Pim aside, in an unceremonious way, went at once into the drawing-room, and approached Laurence with outstretched hands.

'It is too bad to keep you waiting till this hubbub has quieted down. How good of

you to come and see us so soon after your arrival at Coombe Delaway!'

'I fear you might rather say, "How unkind of you not to call till you are leaving!" for I am going away the day after to-morrow.'

A shade of disappointment passed like a cloud over Helen's bright face. Then, smiling, she said, 'You are but a bird of passage among us latterly. Do you stay so short a time at Coombe Delaway to enhance your value with your sister, who is already too fond of her brother?'

Whatever reply Laurence may have made was drowned in the clamour of dogs as Lady Poges slowly entered the room. By her side walked Bomba, breathing quickly and heavily, his long tongue hanging out of his mouth, and behind and around her frisked Nip, Tip, and Pim, uttering ear-piercing barks.

'You are quite a stranger,' said she to Laurence in her kindest tones. 'I don't

think we have seen you at Poges Court since the winter. Helen and I should have been so disappointed to have missed you. Watson, put the teapot and cups and saucers on the piano,' she continued to the melancholy servant, as he brought in the tea, 'for Bomba will upset it on the small table. And put the cake on the mantelpiece, where Nip can't smell it; and hide the bread and butter in the ottoman, or Tip and Pim will have it.'

These instructions were carried out to the letter by Watson, who relieved his feelings by raising his eyebrows and pursing his mouth up tightly.

'Afternoon tea here is generally like a picnic on account of the dogs,' said Helen. 'I must stand to pour out the tea, the piano is too high for me to sit to it.'

'Don't be too lavish with the cream, my dear. See first if there is enough for Nip and Tip each to have a little. Pim must not have any, for it disagrees with him.'

'There is enough for us all, even including the human beings,' replied Helen. 'There! I thought what would happen! Bomba has lifted the lid of the ottoman with his nose, and has stolen the bread and butter. Auntie, I shall take upon myself to turn Bomba out of the room,' and Laurence helped her in the congenial task with cheerful alacrity.

'Poor Bomba!' said Lady Poges in a tone of luxurious pity. Helen shot an eloquent glance at Laurence as they led the huge conscience-stricken hound to the door, whose carnal pleasure in devouring a plateful of bread and butter was damped by the knowledge of having possessed himself of it in a currish manner.

'It really is hard on a huge beast like Bomba, who needs a whole landscape to disport himself in, to expect him to behave with discretion and reserve in a drawing-room.'

'The poor fellow is out of his element here,' said Helen.

'I wanted to tell you,' said Laurence, as he closed the door after Bomba, 'why I am only paying a flying visit to Coombe Delaway, when I had hoped to stay there for some time, and to see a great deal of you and of my friends in the neighbourhood. I am going to keep a promise of long standing to spend a month with two of my old college friends. I must go on Monday, because one of them sails for Australia in September, so that we have no time to lose. It is a freak of ours to live absolutely alone; we shall have no one to wait upon us, and we shall do our little cooking and housework ourselves. We shall be in the wilds of Shropshire, where we shall know nobody, and nobody will know us, and no callers will invade our domain.'

'A very misanthrope's paradise,' said Helen, amused and interested. 'But what shall you do if you grow tired of each other's exclusive society, and find out that it was not

your friends only, but your friends with all their surroundings at Cambridge, that made them delightful to you?'

'Of course we must run the risk of such a discovery. No doubt a surfeit of our friends' society is a much sharper trial of friendship than years of separation. Still, Borradale, Norton and I are on those comfortable terms that, if we grow tired of each other, we shall frankly show it. We have no appearances to keep up, and can without offence sit silent in each other's company, or absent ourselves by a day at a time without fear of being misunderstood.'

'What a pleasant, unfettered kind of friendship! I wish I could look in upon you, and be invisible myself.'

'Those are the only terms on which you could see us in our retreat, for we are under a solemn engagement that no lady, young or old, shall enter our abode. You need not tell Norah this, she would be so indignant.'

'Indeed, I think I resent it as much as Mrs. Stapleton could do. What lady would ever intrude on you and your friends in your retreat, that you need take precautions to defend yourself beforehand?' said Helen, with heightened colour and laughing eyes.

'It didn't originate with me, Helen, and, if it had done, I should have been obliged to make an exception for you. It is Borradale's idea, and I saw no objection to it. He has suffered a good deal, by which I mean that heaven has been more than usually lavish to him in the matter of female relations, and he thinks it would brace him up and do him good if for a time he saw only his men friends. No, I only stipulate for absolute simplicity of living, and that we should do our own housework ourselves.'

'Do your own *what* yourselves?' broke in Lady Poges, who had so far been a passive listener to the conversation between Laurence Temple and her niece.

'Our own housework,' said Laurence, turning towards her with a smile.

'My dear Mr. Temple, have you really weighed the shocking sacrifice this will entail upon you?' asked Lady Poges, languidly opening her eyes. She had been leaning back in her chair as though asleep, overcome with a sense of vicarious fatigue in seeing Helen make the tea and turn Bomba out of the room.

'I think I have,' said Laurence, cheerily. 'It will be by no means the first time that I have cooked my own dinner, and I can keep a floor as clean as a man-of-war's deck.'

Lady Poges looked distressed. 'I am so glad you are among friends, when you say such strange things. Helen, my dear, you are old enough to know that young men are different from young women. A certain license, you know, a latitude, is permitted to them. I cannot wonder, Mr. Temple, that

you do not wish that ladies should see you when you are so strangely occupied.'

'Of course our proposed mode of life would be impossible if ladies were to share it.'

'Why so?' asked Helen, with her large, frank eyes fixed on Temple.

'Because ladies would not like, and they ought not to like, to spoil their pretty hands with coarse work. And, then, in a household composed of men and women, bent on stern simplicity of living, the heaviest share of the work would ultimately fall on the woman, and gallantry, having nothing to feed upon, would soon die. For after the first novelty was worn off, when any distasteful domestic work had to be done, the man would evade his share of the labour by becoming absent-minded, and claiming his masculine prerogative of entertaining lofty thoughts. He would look at a pile of plates that had been used, shudder at their grease and say, "I am

going for a walk to contemplate Nature. It will clear my brain. I have a good deal to think about." And he would not return from his contemplative walk till he knew that the dishes would be washed up. And so he would go from bad to worse, and the poor lady would do everything, and it would spoil her temper as well as her hands. So you see why I would not attempt a Spartan simplicity of life with a woman of my own rank.'

Helen laughed merrily. 'If I were the lady in the household we are imagining, I would not be so amiable as the one you describe. No, if you left your share of the work undone, you would find it waiting for you on your return. I would not do it for you.'

'Helen,' said her aunt, who was bewildered by the conversation, and had lost her bearings long ago, 'ring for Timmins to take my bonnet and shawl.'

Whenever conversation became amusing, or imaginative, or above her capacity, which

was often the case, Lady Poges simply cut through it, and caused a diversion by talking to the dogs, or by ringing for a servant. She was only happy and in her own depth so long as the narration of trivial facts formed the staple of talk, with here and there a few personal remarks thrown in, and a sprinkling of safe platitudes for garnish. Timmins entered the room and took her mistress's bonnet and shawl, with the air of one who is ground down to the earth by such heavy service.

'It was thoughtless of Timmins, very thoughtless, to allow me to keep my bonnet on indoors on such a warm day. I ran a risk of catching cold by having it removed. My dear Mr. Temple, I hope you will take every wise precaution against catching cold in the strange primitive life you contemplate leading. If either of your friends is delicate you undertake a great responsibility in subjecting him to such hardships. Cottages are always damp,

and that causes cold feet, a fruitful source of serious mischief. Shall I ring for Timmins to show you the very best way of making a mustard plaster?' and Lady Poges extended her bony hand towards the bell, with fingers covered with large, loose rings.

'Not for worlds, I beg you. We shall have a great deal of mustard with us, and as I neither eat beef nor catch cold, my share of the mustard pot will be at the disposal of my friends.'

'I see I need not be anxious about you,' said the literal-minded lady. 'Most young men are so regardless of their health, it is really painful to witness. By the way, Mr. Temple, you may be able to give me some information about the hotel accommodation in the small towns in the neighbouring county,' and Lady Poges sat awaiting a reply with eyes closed and with folded hands.

'I am afraid I cannot tell you anything that you do not know already,' said Laurence.

'Country inns, in the accommodation they afford, bear a strong family likeness to one another. Eggs and bacon to satiety, and tea tasting strongly of the teaspoon.'

'My doctor forbids me to take anything strong,' interrupted Lady Poges; 'but I ask you about the inns, because a short driving tour is recommended for me this summer, and, knowing our own county so well, I wish to go into Shropshire for a little change of scenery.'

'If it should happen to be while you and your friends are rusticating,' said Helen, 'we shall call upon you, and see if you could have the barbarity to turn us away from your door. I should like to try whether the old standing laws of hospitality and courtesy would not prove stronger than your whimsical new code.'

Helen Wentworth was fascinated by the idea of the three young men living together in the simple enjoyment of their friendship, and independent of the luxuries and softnesses of life which at times press like weights and fetters

on thoughtful men and women. But the presence of her aunt, with her incessant demands on her undivided attention, made it impossible for her to pursue the subject. When Laurence rose to leave, the three small dogs burst forth into sharp, distracting barks, answered from the hall by Bomba's deep bass, and, in a clamour that rendered him almost inaudible, he bade good-bye to Lady Poges.

Under cover of the canine din Helen said to him: 'I do not pretend to have any nerves, but whatever did duty for them in my frame has been shattered long ago by these dogs. Do tell me when you come back again how your experiment in plain living and high thinking turns out. I shall long to know.'

'I will not fail to give you a full account. I shall come to Coombe Delaway for a few days when I leave Shelton, and then I will tell you all about our little primitive ways and doings.'

Lady Poges was as much disturbed by what Laurence had told her as was possible to a

woman of her temperament. What was this wild scheme of gentlemen roughing it in a cottage, for all the world like common people? Were there not sorrows and perils enough in life already, that they should seek to add to them by living in a room with a tiled floor, and doing their own cooking and rough work? If Temple had not been regarded by her as a possible suitor for her niece, she would have pronounced him mad on the spot without further evidence. As it was she preferred to think that he had told her and Helen an untruth—that he had invented an absurd story as a blind to some discreditable adventure.

'Aunt Marian, how can you suppose such an insulting thing as that Laurence Temple would tell an untruth?' said Helen warmly.

'Do not fire up in that manner, my dear. I am older than you are, and I have sufficient experience of life to enable me to assert that young men do not go away together to live like the wild heathen in cottages. There must

be something hidden under it all. The most charitable hope we can form is that it may perhaps be as he says, and that young men only compose this party of pleasure,' and Lady Poges sank back in her cushions, closed her eyes, and held a bottle of smelling salts to her nose. Angry words rose to Helen's lips in reply, but she checked them by remembering how futile was expostulation with a woman like her aunt. She could not bear to hear Laurence Temple's name linked to base suspicions, so, while Lady Poges was inhaling her pungent salts, Helen rose silently and left the room, and in the security of her own bed-chamber her outraged feelings found relief in a shower of indignant tears.

CHAPTER VI.

KEEPING THE COMPACT.

'Think us no churls, nor measure our good minds by this rude place we live in.'

'Cadwal and I will play the cook and servant. . . . Come, our stomachs will make what's homely savoury.'—*Cymbeline.*

Laurence Temple arrived at Shelton before his friends, and was walking to and fro in the station, waiting for the express that was to bring Norton and Borradale from London. He was beguiling the time in conversation with an old farmer, who was explaining to him his theory of the cause of the rise in wages and the fall in agricultural profits, when the one quick train of the day rushed into the station, and his friends alighted from a third-class carriage, each bearing his modest

luggage in his hand. Temple shook hands warmly with Borradale, and looked affectionately in his dark, expressive face.

'If things were as they ought to be, you would be receiving Norton and me, for you are in the position of host, and are the only one of us that knows Shelton,' said Temple.

'We stand on no ceremony here, my dear fellow, and both of you will know enough of Shelton before our month is over. Where is Norton? He was with me a moment ago;' and he cast a keen sidelong glance down the platform.

'He's helping a woman and a baby out of the train,' said Temple smiling, as he saw Norton's slight figure at the door of a third-class carriage, actively engaged in helping a stout woman to alight, and at the same time holding her baby and bandbox for her.

'Norton's a most forgiving fellow,' said Borradale, his black eyebrows working up and down as he spoke. 'You see that baby

he has just given to its mother? It has cried almost without intermission since we left Paddington, and has tried how it likes a yell on every knee in the carriage, except mine, and there were eight of us. Norton wanted to come down first-class, and I had the greatest difficulty in making him see that our cheap and simple habits should begin with our journey from town. But once having entered the carriage, he was far more urbane than I to our fellow-travellers.'

Richard Norton was a short, fair-haired young man, carrying in his left eye an unframed glass, without a cord or any means of attaching it to him should he for a moment relax the tension of the frown that held it in its place. When he had finished his kindly offices to his fellow-travellers he stepped nimbly along the platform, and shook Temple warmly by the hand. 'Delighted to see you, Temple. Where is the book-stall?'

'Bad news can never be broken gently,

Norton. Let me tell you briefly there is no book-stall.'

'No book-stall! Nonsense! Where am I to get my newspaper? I must have my daily paper!'

'Must have? These are high words,' said Borradale as they left the station together. 'You can get a paper by ordering it from London. But why not for a time forget the whole rascally political world? If you did not read a newspaper for a month, you might, perhaps, at the end of that time think your own thoughts on a few subjects.'

'Well, if you are willing to forego your papers I suppose I can do so too; but, be it clearly understood, this form of severe and simple living is not specified in the bond. Still I am willing to try, and we'll see who breaks down first'—and Norton's face relaxed into a smile which very nearly sent the unattached glass flying, but it was saved by a sudden frown of unusual severity.

'This month of roughing it in the country will be splendid practice for my Australian life,' said Borradale, swinging his bag on his shoulder.

'Perhaps it may be,' said Norton, who was already tired of carrying his luggage, 'but that does not apply to Temple and me, who must remain in the old country. Hallo! There is a boy pushing a handcart in our direction. Let us get him to take our luggage for us;' and he stopped the boy and threw his bag on the cart.

'A splendid idea,' said Borradale, throwing his bag after Norton's; 'now, Temple, bring yours.'

'I'm not going to give in in the first half-hour,' said Temple laughing. 'You luxurious fellows may do as you please, but I shall carry my bag'

'Temple will keep us up to the mark, I see,' said Borradale, giving a droll twist to his dark face, as he lifted his luggage off the hand-

cart. 'My character is always firmest in cold weather; on a hot day like this I am troubled by indecision of mind. Come, Norton, shoulder your pack!'

'No, I am not going to yield to a vacillating spirit. I've just put my bag on the cart, and there I am determined it shall stay. I am reserving myself for this evening. I don't know what work will be allotted to me. It may be something that will tax my strength.'

The road from Shelton ran for three miles through a country so fine that familiarity could not breed indifference to its beauty, and it made a deep impression on the traveller who saw it for the first time. The hills that bounded the western horizon were not lofty enough to give any touch of terror to the landscape. They were more impressive from their noble outline than from their height, which yet was sufficient for the display of mountain gloom and mountain glory, but all on a small scale, as though in concession to

human weakness. The wide valley that lay between the winding road and the hills was richly wooded, and from the long stretches of meadow land by the river side, where the haymakers were at work, came the pleasant sound of scythe-sharpening. The river was in perfect accord with the country through which it flowed. It had its source among mountains, and retained the swift impetuosity of its origin, but without volume of water to oppress the imagination. But in flood time the river that to-day ran sparkling and dimpling below the level of the meadows, in a few hours would rise and lay a wide country under water, and become a terror and a desolation.

Borradale had the advantage over his friends of knowing the country intimately, and, as he pointed out its beauties, he spoke as though he were the proprietor and discoverer of the landscape. 'Look at my hills,' he said, fondly. 'In the course of a month you will

get to know something of their engaging ways. Don't say you wish they were loftier. I would not have them a foot higher. They show me every pageant of nature that I have watched with awe on the Alps, only my little hills enact it all on a comfortable and human scale, so that I watch them with love and delight. No cruel avalanches ever rush down their slopes, bringing death and destruction with them. The utmost they do in the winter is to assume a light and becoming head-dress of snow, which they quickly remove in deference to the beams of the sun. No, give me scenery that I can enjoy in a purely human way, without being scared out of my senses by it. I have been in such awful mountain-girt valleys in Switzerland that I felt it was too much for flesh and blood; I almost shrieked at the sound of my own footstep, and I am convinced that one ought to be a disembodied spirit to do justice to such scenery, and to enjoy it properly.'

Here the road grew steeper, and Borradale and Temple, carrying their carpet bags, lagged behind in the heat, while the unencumbered Norton walked quickly on, apparently oblivious of his companions. Richard Norton had gone through a grievous experience in the last six months, of which he had hinted in his letters to Borradale. He had fallen deeply in love with a beautiful girl, and was made happy by believing that she returned his love. They were engaged to be married, and, though he saw little of her, as the lady lived in Scotland and he in London, yet they corresponded constantly, and their engagement had an air of stability, and promised to run the usual course. But poor Norton was barbarously jilted without the least warning, and the young girl, on whose fidelity he would have pledged his life, suddenly married an exceedingly wealthy middle-aged widower with a large family of children. Under the cruel shock of faith betrayed, and

love scorned, for a short time Norton lost faith in men and women equally, and he sought relief by pouring out the full tide of his bitterness and disappointment in the composition of a stinging satire. By this means he thought to skim the acrid froth from his mind, and be rid of it for ever. His blank verse was not without power, because it was the genuine expression of strong feeling; but it was rough and inharmonious, and his satire struck out right and left, chastising man and woman impartially; only the infant and suckling was spared his lash. The poem had run on to very great length, and Norton thought that a quiet month in the country would afford him the opportunity he desired to polish and finish it, and his friends observed with dismay that half his slender luggage consisted of manuscript.

None but Norton knew the good it did him to write his venomous satire. It was a mental blood-letting, it lowered his tempera-

ture and calmed his delirium, and, when he wrote 'Finis' on the last page of his manuscript, he rose from his desk, not a poet, but once more a sane man. Norton had signed the agreement stipulating that no woman should darken their doors during the time of their sojourn together with hearty merriment, and it was a matter of the utmost indifference to him. But now, though from another motive from Borradale's, Norton, too, was glad of the prospect of a month free from the society of any member of that sex which he considered as created solely for the bewilderment and discomfiture of man. Borradale, having been surrounded all his life by his overwhelming number of female relations, regarded women in a very 'Hail-fellow-well-met' kind of spirit. He had a friendly feeling towards women in general. He liked them certainly, but he liked men much better. So far there had not been a ray of sentiment in his relation with any woman. For the

present he was frankly and heartily weary of their society, and, as he stated in his letter to Laurence Temple, he was going to the ends of the earth to visit a country where as yet men-folk preponderated in the population. As for Temple neither had he lost his freedom of heart any more than Borradale, though he was of a more imaginative and impressionable nature than his friend. So far he had been occupied with wide-spreading kindly affections of too general a nature to be concentrated on any one particular object. Had not his whole mind been absorbed in his visionary schemes for drawing rich and poor together in bonds of human affection, could he have known Helen Wentworth without wishing to appropriate to himself so much sweetness and winning grace of mind and body? But he was not at leisure to think of himself or his own happiness, and, believing that he saw into the future, he was blind to

the present, and Love passed him by in the guise of friendship.

At the end of this digression, which was needful in order that we might know in what frame of mind the three friends entered upon their experiment, Laurence Temple, Tom Borradale, and Dick Norton stood in the kitchen of Mrs. Haggart's cottage, looking about them with interest and amusement, at the quaintness and simplicity of their abode and its furniture. It was a low, white-washed room, with a stout beam crossing the ceiling, from which hung a flitch of bacon, and a green bough, the latter intended to serve as a counter attraction to the flies, who, however, were not so simple as Mrs. Haggart supposed them to be, but flew gaily past the leafy entertainment provided for them to buzz and cluster round the bacon. A small settle with a high back stood to the right of the fire-place, and a three-cornered chair of primitive discomfort and austerity occupied the other

side of the hearth. The brightly polished grate contained what Mrs. Haggart called 'a cold fire'—namely, a mass of paper, sticks and coal, awaiting only the application of a lighted match to become a veritable hot fire, compounded of flame and smoke. On the hob stood a sullen-looking black kettle, with a haughty and uplifted expression of spout, and in front of the fire-place was a brass stand, on which to set the Dutch oven. Opposite the low diamond-paned window was a small oak dresser and a tall clock, called by Borradale 'the grenadier,' on account of its height and general military bearing, and it was making as much ostentatious noise over its work as though it were a modern sham, instead of the venerable timekeeper it had been for a century past. To the left of the fire-place, where the light from the window shone on its polished panels, was a three-cornered cupboard precisely resembling that of Mother Hubbard, which on a memorable occasion

'was bare,' but this particular cupboard was filled on each shelf with Mrs. Haggart's best crockery. The kitchen floor was of red tiles, pure and clean as a church floor. Beyond the tall clock and the copper warming-pan a door opened into a tiny passage, to the left leading into the back kitchen, to the right by a narrow, clean-scrubbed staircase leading to the two bed-rooms overhead.

When the young men had piled their carpet-bags on the settle, and the two of them who were strangers in the cottage had examined everything in detail, Norton said with enthusiasm, 'What a splendid place to smoke in! No carpets, no curtains, nothing to hinder the rational enjoyment of life. I wish I could persuade my mother to have a drawing-room like this, and to let me off from wearing a tail coat at dinner.'

'I could be perfectly happy in a room no better than this,' said Temple.

'Think you could?' replied Borradale,

winking his eyes rapidly. 'Anne Haggart, who is used to this kind of thing, can't be content without her chamber of horrors answering to a drawing-room, and I'll show it to you. Many a Sunday afternoon when I was a small boy I have sat in it as good as gold, or as you now behold me, looking at the pictures in "Pilgrim's Progress,"' and he flung wide open the low door of the parlour, which was opposite the kitchen fire-place.

It was a pathetic little room, full of tokens of a humble aspiration after refinement and elegance. The window was draped with a faded, flowery-patterned chintz, and from the beam across the ceiling hung a glass globe, full of gaily coloured silks, suspended at the proper height to break the head of the unwary who walked beneath it. The mantelpiece was garnished at either side of the oval mirror with a silhouette in a black frame, and in the middle in the place of honour stood a pot image of praying Samuel in a blue night-

gown powdered with golden stars, and with dark ringlets falling on his shoulders. Borradale took the image in his hands and turned it carefully over.

'Ah! there it is, the mark of a chip I gave it one Sunday afternoon when I was naughty, and pushed Samuel off the mantelpiece, because he would stay on his knees so long. You see this pale green glass walking-stick hung above the mirror? Anne Haggart once had a sweetheart, a glass blower at Stourbridge, and he made her this *tour de force* for a present, but somehow the poor fellow proved more brittle than his glass, for here it still hangs, while he has been buried these thirty years. But to more cheerful topics. There hangs the portrait of the big pike caught in Hollowmere the year I was born, and a venomous, ugly beast he is. But look at our books; these two shelves contain our Trinity library for the time being; we shall have access to no other.'

Laurence Temple took down the first book he touched at a venture, and a pleased smile of recognition lighted his face. 'A volume of Cobbett's "Twopenny Trash," by all that's unexpected! I could read Cobbett on a desert island, and want no living society. And Jethro Tull's "Horse Shoeing Husbandry" I see, with a preface by Cobbett, and "Elon Pountney," written on the title-page—what an odd name!'

'I suppose "Elon" does strike you as an odd Christian name, but I have been used to it, and to other queer Scripture names in this part of the world. We've a Terah in this neighbourhood—that's an unusual name—Terah Jarvis, a market gardener, down the Shelton Road there,' and Borradale turned towards the window and indicated the direction of Terah Jarvis's abode by a rapid movement of his flexible eyebrows. 'I remember, though he was called Terah, it did not prevent his daughters being the prettiest little girls in

Shropshire. But I've just remembered who "Elon Pountney" was. He was Anne Haggart's uncle, the gentleman who caught the big pike, whose portrait we have just admired. We're rich in literature, Temple; here is our beloved "Complete Angler"! Ah! we dare not read Walton's all too delicious receipt for cooking a pike, for we are pledged to simplicity of living for a month to come, and we must not rouse desires that may not be gratified. But he winds up, you remember, in these moving terms: "This dish of meat is much too good for any but anglers, or very honest men." This describes us exactly—you the angler, I the very honest man—and on some happy day, when there are no vows upon us, we will roast a pike, stuffed within with savoury herbs, anchovies, and pickled oysters, and basted without with claret.'

'One could eat a shoe sole with such accompaniments as those,' said Temple, more fervently than he was aware of.

'I thought I should rouse my ascetic friend. The mere thought of Walton's roast pike has made me ravenously hungry, and we must consider what our next meal shall be—high tea, low dinner, or a composite entertainment,' and looking over his shoulder Borradale saw that Temple and he were alone in the room.

'Where's Norton?'

'The fellow has the fidgets on him, and is unpacking his things in the kitchen,' and as Temple spoke Norton entered the little parlour carrying a pile of manuscript, surmounted by a small desk, which he balanced skilfully as he walked.

'I thought,' he said in an apologetic tone, 'that I might have this little place to write in. It's very quiet, and I shan't be in your way here.'

'All right, my dear fellow,' said Borradale cheerily; 'but before you settle down to the luxury of composition, let us see how the

garrison is victualled, and then we will apportion the housework among us. Better face the realities of life at once.'

Norton appeared slightly dashed for a moment, and then contracting his brows till his eyeglass seemed to burrow in his face, he too said, 'All right, my dear fellow,' and the three friends went into the kitchen, led by Borradale, who, as they passed the copper warming-pan, beat a light tattoo on its resonant lid.

Just then the tall clock began a groaning and roaring sound preliminary to striking, or, as Borradale said, the grenadier was clearing his throat before he spoke. After a prolonged whirring and rasping the clock struck six with all its might, and the kitchen echoed to its clanging strokes, which ended with a click and a spasm.

'I hope this kind of thing does not occur often,' said Norton, whose nerves were a little on the sharp edge.

'Not oftener than once an hour as a rule,' said Borradale, though I remember when I was a little chap we were waked by the clock going mad in the night. It struck 410, and then Anne Haggart thought it best to interfere, so she went downstairs and silenced it by taking off the weights, but for which it might have been striking still. And now let us see what we have in the dresser cupboard, for I pride myself on being a good provider,' and Borradale opened the cupboard door and beheld with satisfaction tins of biscuits, pots of marmalade, boxes of sardines, tea, coffee, and a jar of oatmeal.

'That oatmeal I ordered expressly for you, Temple, because you eat no meat. There is enough oatmeal there, if you consume it all, to give you a Scotch accent before the month is out. The marmalade is for us all generally, but for Norton particularly, while this tin of caviare——'

'Caviare! What wild luxury is here?

When you drew up the agreement to enforce simplicity of living we did not contemplate caviare. It does not come within the meaning of the Act,' and Temple made a snatch at the guilty tin, which Borradale adroitly threw to the back of the cupboard.

'What is simplicity of living?' he said. 'Is it not restricting ourselves to the necessaries of life? Very well, then, caviare is a necessary of life to me, so that by partaking of it I do not depart from simplicity of living. To you evidently it is not a necessary of life, but a luxury, and as such I am bound to take care that you have none of it. If there is a thing I set my face against it is luxury,' and Borradale shook his head.

'Norton, don't let us allow ourselves to be corrupted by such sophistry,' said Temple. 'I shall light the fire and set the kettle on for tea, for something we must have,' and he struck a match and applied it to the 'cold

fire,' which flamed up immediately with a cheerful, crackling sound.

'Wasn't it rather rash of you to light the fire before you had seen how it was laid?' asked Norton, glaring with an intense expression through his eyeglass. 'You won't know how to lay the sticks and things again so that they'll light another time.'

Temple laughed. 'You don't suppose I don't know how to lay a fire, as well as how to put a match to it, do you?'

Norton looked on with his hands in his pockets while Temple reached down the tea-things from the corner cupboard, and Borradale fetched the bread and butter from some mysterious regions at the back of the kitchen.

'I'll show you to-morrow where Anne Haggart has put all our larger provisions, such as bread, and butter, and cheese,' said Borradale, 'but this evening we will get our tea very quickly. Norton, my sweet cockney, I know you have never seen an egg except in

a shop window or on the breakfast table, but run into the back garden will you, where the poultry live, and see if they have laid any eggs for our tea,' and Norton, as preoccupied as he was obedient, made a willing start in the wrong direction, and opened the front door.

'Oh, you're no good! Let me go egg-hunting, and meanwhile you find me a big knife, and when I come back with the eggs I'll cut some ham and broil it, and Temple, you find the gridiron.'

Borradale was so long away that Temple cut the ham and made the tea in his absence. At length he returned, looking very warm physically, but mentally cool as ever.

'Ah! that's good,' he said, as he saw the tea-table spread; 'but don't flatter yourselves that you'll have any eggs with your tea, for I've broken them all. An old hen flew out over my head, and I tried to catch her, and in the scuffle I dropt the eggs, and

the brute has led me ten times round the garden after her before I could drive her into the pen again. I'll broil the ham, for it's a thing I thoroughly understand.'

'That isn't a fire to broil with, it's all flame and smoke,' said Norton, his hands still in his pockets, and frowning heavily.

'The fire's well enough if the ham will only behave itself,' Borradale replied, as he skilfully saved a rasher from slipping into the flames. 'Do something for your living—cut the bread and make the mustard,' and Norton fixing his eyeglass firmer than ever by means of both hands and a tremendous frown, with an air of concentrated purpose turned to the table and began cutting bread as if for a wager.

'Stop, stop! we shan't eat all that bread at one meal, and it will be dry as chips by supper-time,' said Temple.

Norton threw down the knife. 'Oh hang it all, then, I'll make the mustard. How do you make mustard?'

'I'll make the mustard, and you can either watch me, or superintend the broiling.'

Norton turned to watch the more spirited process going on at the fire, where Borradale with his wristbands turned back, and a hot red face with an exceedingly grave expression, was stabbing the ham incessantly with a fork to see how it was getting on. The fat that fell into the fire constantly kindled into a leaping flame that darted up at the rashers of ham, and to save them Borradale kept lifting the gridiron high in the air, while a good deal more smoke than could be desired rose from the fire. Norton watched the process with great interest. As the smoke grew thicker and the rashers darker in colour, he said contemplatively, 'I always thought ham was smoked before it was cooked.'

'Then you thought wrong,' shouted Borradale, as a drop of boiling fat scalded the back of his hand, and he started with the shock. 'Here, quick, bring a hot dish some-

body ; the thing's done to a turn,' and he lifted the gridiron off the fire, showering drops of hot fat on the white hearthstone.

'Confound it all, one of you might have thought of the dish while I was broiling my eyes out at the fire. Here, Temple, you have your wits about you, move the teapot quick as lightning, and I'll set the gridiron down on the tray,' and the hot ham, still sputtering from the fire, was instantly put in the place of honour on the tea-tray.

Three-quarters of an hour by the tall clock had they been in preparing their tea, and as Borradale, hot and tired, helped himself to a large rasher of blackened ham, he said, 'I don't feel like any more cooking to-night, so if either of you want a hot supper you will have to cook it yourselves. Temple, you don't take meat, I know ; if you did I could almost recommend this ham. It's different from any you've ever tasted. But the gridiron's an uncommonly good thing to serve it on.

Can't think myself why we should complicate life with dishes.'

'There is only one drawback to having the gridiron on the table, and that is that when we want the tray again to-morrow, it will be covered with ham fat, which one of us must clean off before it can be used,' said Temple.

'Oh don't think of to-morrow, the cares of to day are enough,' said Norton, who was not particularly enjoying his friend's cooking.

'Much care you've had to-day!' said Borradale, who was still very hot from the fire. Norton appeared not to hear him, but, turning his rasher on his plate, he said, 'I prefer ham smoked before it is broiled.'

'Smoke is smoke,' said Borradale, helping himself to more ham, 'and it is a mere detail whether you apply it before or during the process of broiling. There's a knock at the door. See who it is, Temple, there's a good

fellow; and mind, if it's a woman, she does not come in!'

Temple rose and opened the door, and in the porch stood a ragged tramp, begging for bread or a penny. As Borradale caught sight of the man an expression of the utmost relief and delight illumined his face. He jumped up, taking his plate with him, ran to the door and pressed into the beggar's hand the rasher of ham with a hunch of bread, and with a fervent 'thank you' to the tramp, to whom he felt indebted for his opportune appearance, he shut the door upon him and returned laughing to the table.

'Why didn't you ask him to call again at this time to-morrow evening?' asked Temple. 'Because you or Norton will have to do the cooking to-morrow, and you must make your own arrangements.'

When at length the teapot was exhausted, the large loaf lay a mere wreck on the trencher, and the butter and marmalade had

disappeared, the three friends rose, and, without giving a thought to the *débris* of the feast, left the cottage and went for a stroll in the meadows by the river. It was nearly eight o'clock, and the heat and glare of the day was succeeded by the dewy freshness of evening. The air was full of the scent of newly-cut grass, and groups of tired mowers passed them in the narrow lanes. The sun was still above the horizon, and every tree and hedgerow cast long refreshing shadows. After a little light talk the young men lapsed into silence for a while—an involuntary tribute to the tranquil beauty of the scene. But as they neared the river, Norton broke the silence by snatches of sentimental song, sung with the utmost fervour of feeling; but as he had neither voice nor ear it was only by listening closely to the words that his friends had any idea of the song he was attempting.

'My dear Norton,' said Borradale when he could speak for laughter, 'you should never

sing! You should relieve your feelings by recitations.'

Norton was not at all offended by this advice. 'I have tried it,' he said, 'but words only are not enough, you must have music as well;' and again he burst forth dolefully.

Borradale slipped his arm through Temple's, and walked briskly on with him, leaving Norton behind. 'What a fool it makes of a man to be in love! It really is hardly fair to listen to him while the fit's on him, he'll be so ashamed of himself by-and-bye. You and I, Temple, at all events, are sane at present; let us keep so as long as we can If falling in love be a distemper of the soul through which all must pass, may it come to us late and leave us early.'

'Amen,' said Temple, 'but it really is very much in a man's own control whether he falls in love or not. The very expression "to fall" in love implies that it is something of the nature of an accident, against which one

should be on one's guard. I would rather say "I have made up my mind to marry so-and-so, than that I had "fallen in love" with her,' and as he spoke he cut off the top of a fern with a stroke of his cane.

'Well,' said Borradale, 'and suppose you make up your mind on stern conviction that so-and-so is the right woman for you to love, and you find out afterwards that you are mistaken, would it not be more humiliating to be obliged to admit an error in judgment rather than to own you were misled by your feelings?'

'Undoubtedly it would be more humiliating to confess an error of the intellect rather than of the heart. But why should a man make either?'

It was now twilight, and Borradale was watching the first pale stars pulse on the horizon, and his mind had wandered from the subject of their conversation, so that instead of replying to Temple's exceedingly youthful

question he merely repeated the words after him, 'Why should a man make either?'

'Half the blunders we make, Borradale, are for want of firm purpose, and a blunder in marriage revenges itself out of all proportion to the offence. When I marry it will be when I am convinced that I have found the right woman to marry; that it is the right time for me to marry, and that my marriage will be a step further in the direction in which the purpose of my life tends. It must help me to carry out my idea.'

'Oh yes, I know your theory about marriage, and I hope it will always remain a theory, and then it will trouble no one. But you have never been in love, Temple, that's clear to the casual observer.'

'I certainly never have been. But how did you find it out?' asked Temple with surprise.

Borradale laughed. 'My dear fellow, there is a great simplicity about you at times. No

one who has ever been in love could speak and theorise about it as you do. If you ever fall in love, Temple, I predict for you a very deep fall, and you and your philosophy will come down together.'

They were now within sight of the cottage, and the light from the little parlour window showed them that Norton had reached home first and had settled to his work. The front door stood open, and as they entered the kitchen the light of a candle standing on the dresser revealed to Borradale and Temple the dispiriting sight of the tea things—plates, gridiron and greasy tray—all standing just as they had left them a couple of hours before. In the parlour sat Norton writing rapidly. An inspiration had come upon him while he was out, and he had rushed home at once in order to give suitable form to his glowing thoughts, and his friends broke in upon him when he was entirely abstracted from the things of earth. He started

and shivered as if a cold wind blew over him, when the two young men burst noisily into the room.

'Norton, it really is too bad of you to come in first, and never so much as notice those disgusting objects on the tea-table. We thought you'd hurried home to wash up and get the supper ready!'

Norton was well into the fifth book of his satire, and his muse was at its happiest, when Borradale broke in upon him with his coarse allusions, and snapped off the thread of his imagination short. He rose and shut his desk with a crash.

'Come, Borradale,' said Temple, 'let us practise the division of labour among ourselves to-night. Leave the writing of poetry to Norton, the washing up to me, and you stick to the cooking.'

'As if a fellow could turn poetry off and on to order,' said Norton indignantly. 'I was doing well, very well indeed, when you burst

into the room with some vulgar remarks about washing up, and scattered all my ideas. You have done me a great deal of harm.'

Borradale laughed till he had to fling himself on the settle, and when he had recovered sufficiently to be able to stand, he pointed to the hideous discomfort of the tea-table, and to the dismal ashes in the grate where the fire had long since died out, and began to laugh again. But Temple, more practical, drew the table into the corner of the kitchen, where it was not so conspicuously offensive an object, set clean plates on the dresser with bread and cheese, and invited his friends to partake of the frugal supper, which appeared as if by magic out of the surrounding chaos. Norton was melancholy and reserved, and stood to eat his bread and cheese, while Temple and Borradale sat down and were merry, and scattered crumbs on the floor to attract the mice.

'There are only two bed-rooms upstairs,'

said Borradale; 'the one overhead has two beds in it, and the other above the parlour has one bed, and now let us draw lots for the rooms. The sooner we go to bed to-night the better it seems to me. What good would it do to sit up contemplating the greasy wreck of the tea-things when we have no hot water to wash them with? Temple, another time we'll carry the things into the back kitchen as soon as we have done with them, and put them right out of sight. I shall grow melancholy if we don't, for I was brought up to very clean ways.'

The lots were drawn, and it fell to Temple to have the little bed-room over the parlour, and Borradale and Norton were to share the larger room over the kitchen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

'When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room. Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.'—*As You Like It.*

For the first few days chaos reigned supreme in the cottage, after which life settled down into some kind of method and order. Borradale improved in his cooking, and as he thought it good practice for his Australian journey his friends readily acceded to his proposal that he should daily prepare what they were pleased to call their dinner. Temple was responsible for breakfast, and for their frugal supper of bread and cheese and salad, while Norton proved to be so helpless a per-

son that he could only be trusted to boil the water to make the tea. And even in the discharge of this simple duty he managed to scald his foot, through inadvertently attempting to lift the kettle by the lid instead of by the handle. Temple doctored the scald, which was severe enough to keep Norton a prisoner in the house for several days. But for the pain in his foot nothing could have been more agreeable to him than his unexpected captivity, and even in spite of his suffering he made the greatest progress with his poem in the long quiet hours he spent by himself. The day before his accident Norton had ordered a daily paper to be sent to him. 'I know I am not very useful in the house,' he said, 'but I can at least provide paper to light our fire with,' and each morning as the postman came up the garden path Temple and Borradale waylaid him to try who could first possess himself of the newspaper, about which they had affected so much indifference.

When they had devoured every item of news, already twenty-four hours old, the paper was tossed to its lawful owner, with the inspiriting assurance that there was nothing in it whatever.

In the division of household duties at the cottage, Borradale, in addition to preparing the important meal of the day, undertook to do the necessary small marketings, and all domestic work was apportioned between him and Temple, with the exception of the humble, but most necessary, duty of washing up after dinner. They had no objection to washing up the breakfast and tea things. Even Norton could do that with no worse accident than breaking the handle of the milk jug; but the washing up of greasy plates and dishes became daily more abhorrent to them, especially to Temple, who ate no meat himself, and therefore was not responsible for the worst conditioned plates. They had allowed a two days' accumulation of crockery to take place,

while they dallied with the subject of dish-washing, and each offered the other the first turn at the uncongenial task. But on the third day, as Temple viewed with loathing the increasing pile of willow-patterned plates, and realised the fact that something must be done, as there was not so much as a cheese plate in the house in a fit state for use, he called Borradale to come to him from the kitchen, where he sat writing a letter at the dresser.

'What's the matter?' he said appearing pen in hand at the scullery door.

'I have no affinity with grease,' said Temple solemnly, as though speaking to himself.

'Who has?' asked Borradale laughing.

'Someone must have if we could only find him, for there is no object, however repulsive, but it is someone's delight, if we only knew whose,' and Temple pointed to the revolting pile of greasy dishes and plates. 'I begin to think, Borradale, that we were rash in settling

beforehand that no woman should enter our doors. We might have found some excellent creature who would have been very glad to increase her scanty means by doing our greasy work for us, and who would really enjoy doing it too. Rough work I don't mind, but I find I am not adapted to grease.'

'Yes, I quite understand that you want a washer-up on purely philanthropic grounds,' said Borradale, 'but till we can find one, what are we to do? for I confess I have no more affinity with grease than you have, and if we must continue to wash up our own plates and dishes, I shall be driven to the public-house. But a bright thought strikes me,' and he put his pen over his ear, and entered the scullery with a light and confident step. 'Suppose that instead of washing we fire the plates. That would be a perfectly clean operation, and extremely interesting.'

'What do you mean?' asked Temple with a puzzled expression.

'Why, fire the plates, to be sure; burn the grease off them by sticking them between the bars.'

'You'll break them to a dead certainty if you do.'

'Not a bit of it, man. Did you never see plates made? They are exposed to a far greater heat in a kiln than they ever can be in the fire, and you'll see I shall burn them clean in a few minutes. I wonder I never thought of it before,' and Borradale seized the greasiest plate he could find, and took it with him into the kitchen, Temple following to watch the experiment.

Borradale pushed the plate firmly between the bars, when immediately a sharp snap was heard, and with the help of the tongs he drew out of the heart of the fire three large fragments of willow-patterned crockery.

'That was a bad one, it doesn't count,' said the intrepid Borradale. 'Bring me another, it's sure to answer.'

Temple had now entered into the spirit of the experiment, and fetched him two more plates to submit to the ordeal by fire, wondering what their fate would be. Borradale pushed the second plate steadily and deliberately into the heart of the fire.

'You see this kind of thing entirely depends on how you do it,' and as he spoke the same crisp snap was again heard, and the second plate was shattered.

Temple laughed heartily, but Borradale remained quite grave, and rather annoyed with the quality of the crockery.

'The thing ought to answer perfectly. There is nothing so cleansing as fire ; water is a fool to it. The plates ought to be as good as new after a thorough firing,' and he edged the third plate in among the burning coals.

It survived its shattered predecessors just long enough for Borradale to announce the complete success of the experiment, and to predict a revolution in the scullion's art,

when the familiar snap was again heard, and Temple, weak with laughter, raked out of the fire a handful of broken sherds.

'Next time I try firing plates it shall be with real good china that can stand heat,' said Borradale, who was not in the least disconcerted by his failures. 'I am convinced my theory is correct, only, of course, one must have proper material to work upon, and not such crazy ware as old Anne's dinner service.'

'Well, you've helped us thus much, that there are three plates fewer to be washed,' said Temple. 'I wonder where we can find a woman to come and wash up the remainder.'

'No, I mean to hold by the terms of the agreement. If we let one woman into the house, more will follow, and there'll be an end of everything. I shall get a boy to come for an hour every evening to wash all our plates and dishes. I was talking with a lad yesterday who lives across the fields, and I'll way-

lay him coming from school, and make terms with him.'

'You're a wonderfully contriving fellow, Borradale. And now this very night I can mix you a salad at supper worthy of us all, but such as I have refrained from making while we had to wash our own plates, because I am a prodigal with oil.'

'Then you will want some better lettuces than you'll find in this garden for your masterly salad. My good Anne Haggart grows nothing but brown-leather lettuces, with a snowball or a handful of gravel for the heart, according as you cut them in winter or summer. You must walk as far as Terah Jarvis's, and see if his lettuces are as good as they used to be. I remember their quality very well, for I often bought them when I have been staying here for a few days, but it's some years ago now. And,' continued Borradale, 'he has two very pretty daughters, and the old fellow himself was

amusing enough to talk with. He and I were very friendly, and I shall look in upon him one of these days. But this evening you shall go on your quest by yourself. I will stay with Norton, I think he begins to feel hipped after three days' indoors.'

Why do we call anything trivial when our destinies are shaped by the merest accidents, and we see daily on what small hinges great events may turn? Never since salad was first eaten—and that dates back to a very early period, when our first parents might be supposed to be out of love with fruit, from their disastrous experience of it, and turning their attention towards green herbs—never since those distant days can lettuces have been cut more fraught with fate than were those that Laurence Temple fetched from Terah Jarvis's garden. Temple approached his fate as other men do, blindfold, but with his mind filled with fertile thought, waiting only for an impulse from without

to take shape in action. A pleasant image of Helen Wentworth rose before him as he walked, and he smiled at the remembrance of some bright, keen observation of hers. Then he recalled the soft lustre of her brown eyes, though he had not discovered that their softest, sweetest glances were for him. Then he fell to day-dreaming, and tried to imagine her in a simple home, bending her bright energies to the fulfilment of the humble duties of everyday life. But Temple could not think of Helen apart from an atmosphere of wealth and luxury, that he felt to be stifling and oppressive, and from which he strove to escape. Thus thinking on his lonely walk, he found himself at his journey's end sooner than he expected, and he stood at the green wicket gate leading in to Terah Jarvis's garden. There was little danger of missing his way, for above the gate a large white signboard, supported on stout posts, bore a notice to the effect that Terah

Jarvis, market gardener, supplied dealers and families with fruit and vegetables at wholesale and retail prices. The cottage stood back in the garden, facing the road, and a beech-tree cast its friendly shade over the red-tiled roof. A long straight path led from the gate to the porch, and as Temple approached he had time to remark the extreme neatness of the front garden, and the beauty and fragrance of the old-fashioned flowers with which it was filled. The orchards and ground where vegetables were grown lay to the right and to the back of the cottage. In the front garden all was for the pure pleasure of sight and scent, and its flowers, sweet-briar and lavender, were never taken to market, but were given to friends, or gathered to make posies to deck the house with on Sundays and high days. The door stood open, and as Temple, seeing nobody, was about to knock, a young girl stepped from the twilight of the kitchen into the mellow evening light, and in

the radiance of her bright young beauty she was like a living sunbeam. Her golden hair lay in thick waves on her low white brow, and her eyes, blue as sapphires, met Temple's gaze with a directness that confounded him, as, drawing her sleeves down over her white arms, she asked, 'What might you please to want, sir?'

Temple took off his hat and stood with uncovered head before her, paying involuntary homage to her beauty and her womanhood. The girl was accustomed to the effect of her vivid beauty on the beholder. She was used to see her rustic admirers gape dumb and open-mouthed before her, but this was the first time that a man, whom she knew at once for a gentleman, had paid her the tribute of a respectful worship. 'What might you please to want, sir?' The question sounded as inappropriate from those lips as though a Greek statue had been inspired with life to ask him some trivial question about his food or

clothing. Hat in hand, as King Cophetua might have stood with uncovered head before the beggar maiden, Temple stood, while the jarring, commonplace question was repeated.

'I have come to see if Mr. Jarvis has any lettuces,' and, as the prosaic words were uttered with an effort, he felt thankful that Borradale was not with him to see his embarrassment.

Then the bright being who had conquered Temple at her first appearing stepped into the garden and said, 'If you'll follow me, sir, I'll show you where father grows his best lettuces,' and he followed her in a silent rapture. The young girl walked before him with light, firm step, head erect, and untaught grace in every movement. 'These are father's best lettuces,' she said when she had led him in silence through rows of peas and beans; 'we send 'em mostly to Shelton market. How many shall I cut for you, sir?' and she drew a knife out of her pocket, and awaited his reply.

'Half a dozen will be enough. May I not cut them for you?' and he offered to take the knife from her.

But the maiden was not used to the little courtesies of life, and, thinking only that the gentleman wanted to choose the finest lettuces for himself, she said, 'I'll cut them, sir, if you'll point out which you like best.' And she stooped and took a lettuce in her shapely hand, cut it deftly from its stalk, and put it in her apron, and paused a moment while Temple chose another.

An awkward feeling came over him as he reflected that he must pay her for the lettuces, and how could he slip a coin into her hand? or how could his lips frame the words, 'What shall I pay you?' to a being who stirred in him every feeling of devotion and chivalry? But the timely appearance of Terah Jarvis put an end to his perplexity.

'Good evening, sir,' he said, touching his hat to Temple; 'my girl knows how to choose

a lettuce as well as I do myself. Don't cut too much stalk with 'em, Bessie, unless the gentleman likes it; it makes 'em taste bitter.'

Laurence Temple looked with amazement at Bessie's father, in whose crafty face, with small, restless eyes set close together, and long, sharp nose, he could find no trace of likeness to his beautiful daughter.

'Them lettuces 'll eat very sweet, and they're three for twopence,' said Terah, eyeing the stranger with intense curiosity.

Temple put the money into his gnarled, rheumatic hand, saying, as he did so, 'I had no idea, Mr. Jarvis, that your gardens were so extensive;' while in his mind he was thinking, 'I had no idea that your daughter was so beautiful.'

'Aye, they're well enough as to size; but that don't make 'em pay unless there's a deal else goes along with it. I couldn't recommend no one to take to the market gardening, not unless he'd a tidy bit o' money

to put in the land,' and Terah heaved a prosperous sigh, and wondered who the stranger was. 'My little grandson 'll carry the lettuces home for you, sir, if you'll wait a minute; he's helping his grandmother to feed the poultry now.'

'Thank you; if your daughter will kindly tie the lettuces together for me, I will carry them myself.'

'Perhaps it 'll be a long way to carry 'em, sir?' said Bessie, fully as curious as her father to know who their customer might be.

At a word from her Laurence gave them the information they desired. 'Not a very long way; I am staying at Mrs. Haggart's cottage.'

'Has Anne Haggart took to letting lodgings?' said Mrs. Jarvis eagerly, as she and her fat little grandson joined the group.

Heavens! was this great, stout woman, with no particular features, and a mass of battered finery on her head by way of a cap,

the lovely Bessie's mother? Temple raised his hat to her, and replied, 'Mrs. Haggart is good enough to let me and two of my friends have the use of her cottage for a month while she is away. One of them is Mr. Borradale, who knew you a long time ago.'

'Ah!' said Terah, as light began to dawn upon him, 'I remember a very funny young gentleman as used to come and stay at Anne Haggart's, and she'd been his nurse. He was very full of his jokes, was young Mr. Borradale; and he'd come of an evening, and smoke a pipe sometimes uncommon friendly, he would.'

'Yes, I remember Mr. Borradale,' said Bessie, her sweet face brightening with the congenial recollection; 'he bought Harriett and me necklaces at Shelton Fair. Mine was blue beads, and Harriett's was like bull's-eyes done small.'

'Mr. Borradale tells me that he is coming to see you, and to renew his acquaintance

with you, Mr. Jarvis. I will come with him when he calls, if I may?' asked Temple.

'Come when you will, sir, and welcome,' said Terah.

Temple hastened away for fear he should betray by his manner the tumult of feeling roused in him by the sight of the old man's beautiful daughter. In one brief quarter of an hour thoughts that had lain for years in his heart as springs of future action had taken definite shape, and the time had come when he must have the courage of his opinions, and practise what he had preached. Laurence believed that he had seen the embodiment of his ideal. In his eyes Bessie Jarvis was a sweet, unsophisticated girl, of lowly birth and simple nurture, unspoiled by luxury, and ignorant of the ambitions and rivalries that tear the hearts of her high-born sisters in the great world. How sheltered from evil was her simple lot; her sphere, how fitted to foster in her the

womanly graces of loving service, of household ways and homely virtues! His imagination was quickened by the compelling power of the girl's beauty till he unconsciously dowered her with every mental gift and grace; and he required no proof that a beautiful soul tenanted that beautiful body, though all are not queens who dwell in palaces. Bessie Jarvis's parents, regarded as her father and mother, revolted him; but he repressed the feeling, and endeavoured to dwell rather on the impartiality of nature, who produces her masterpieces in unlooked-for places, and has an aristocracy of her own in all ranks and classes. In her absolute unlikeness to her parents Bessie seemed to Temple a gracious creation of Heaven, bearing the direct impress of her Maker's hand more clearly than if her features had been transmitted in the finest ancestral mould. With what strange, exalted feelings he mixed the salad for supper that night! His enthu-

siasm for the salad was gone, and he looked at the lettuce leaves in the bowl before him with very different eyes from those with which Borradale regarded them.

'You can be a prodigal with the oil to-night,' said his friend cheerfully; 'there will be no more washing up to do, for I've found a boy.'

'Found a boy,' repeated Laurence dreamily, for he had found a divinity.

'Yes, found a boy to wash up for us—have you forgotten?'

'Oh, ah! Yes, of course!'

'Why, it was you who first suggested having someone to do it, and now you don't seem to care anything about it. I see old Jarvis grows as fine lettuces as ever,' and Borradale took a leaf and ate it quickly, nibbling it rabbit-wise. 'By the way, Temple, did you see Jarvis's daughters? They were the prettiest little pair of sisters I ever saw.'

'I only saw one,' replied Temple, turning his back to Borradale, and stirring the salad vigorously.

'Which one did you see?' asked Borradale, who hovered over the salad-making.

'They called her Bessie, I believe,' said the disingenuous Temple in the most casual tone he could command.

'Bessie? That would be the little fair one. Harriett was the name of the elder sister, a slender slip of a girl, with soft, wild eyes like a gazelle's. What is Bessie like?'

Temple turned round with a glowing face. 'I don't know what she is like, but I can tell you what she is. She is the most beautiful creature God ever made.'

'A good round assertion, Temple; there's nothing like being positive, and working one's superlatives hard. I shall certainly call to-morrow and see this wonder for myself.'

'And you will regard her with the same reverence that I do,' said Laurence, quietly looking into his friend's dark face with its mobile eyebrows.

'My dear fellow, if you remembered little Bessie Jarvis as I do, reverence is not exactly the word by which to describe my feelings towards her. There is a glamour cast on you to-night, Temple. I'll go and fetch the lettuces myself to-morrow, and see Harriett Jarvis, and if she isn't more beautiful than her younger sister I'll eat the whole of that salad at my own proper risk.'

'Not while I'm here to contest it with you,' said Norton, who had entered the kitchen during the conversation; 'Temple's salads are too good to be monopolised, they must be shared by appreciative friends.'

'Norton,' said Borradale, seating himself on the end of the dresser, 'will you go with me to-morrow to call on "the most beautiful creature God ever made"? That expression,

though a fine one, is not my own, but Temple's.'

Norton shook his head and smiled. 'No, thank you. It's hardly worth my while going. I haven't much power of admiration left in me.'

'You'll feel better when you've finished your poem,' said Borradale encouragingly as he set the bread and cheese on the table by the elaborately prepared salad.

At the mention of his poem Norton cheered up visibly, and to the dismay of his friends rose hastily, ran into the little parlour, and returned immediately, bringing with him a very formidable pile of manuscript. He forgot his supper, and even the salad about which he had been so eager, and, pushing his plate from before him, he laid in its place a fluttering heap of loose sheets of paper that required as much shuffling as a pack of cards to arrange them in their proper sequence. He pushed his eye-glass firmly in his eye, and

smoothed the manuscript before him with both hands, while he said, ‘ You are right. I shall feel much better when I have finished my poem, and I shall be delighted to read the Fifth Book to you this evening.’

Borradale trod hard on Temple’s foot under the table, and cast a reproachful glance at him, as much as to say, ‘ See what you have brought upon us.’

‘ Eat your supper first, my dear fellow ; it is a very bad thing to read aloud on an empty stomach,’ suggested Borradale.

‘ Is it really now ? That is worth knowing. Yes, I’ll eat first, and then I can read for a much longer time without fatigue.’

Was it failure of friendship that made Temple and Borradale hope that after supper Norton might possibly forget to read them Book V. of his Satire? No, it was mere human frailty on their part, which causes those who have not an unlimited stock of

patience to view with dismay the friend who is armed with a lengthy manuscript. Conversation flagged during supper, and each ate a hearty meal, though from widely different motives. Norton ate to fortify his constitution for a good, hard hour of reading aloud his cherished composition. Temple ate heartily to sustain himself under the impending infliction; while Borradale endeavoured to deaden his faculties with bread and cheese and salad to the point at which he would be unable to follow the argument of Book V. of the 'Satire on the Human Race.'

When the salad had disappeared, the bread was diminished, and a hole was dug in the cheese, Norton drew his now neatly arranged pile of manuscript before him, drove his eyeglass home, and began to read aloud in a chanting monotone. Borradale did not like to stop him, but he felt it was hardly fair to begin reading before he had lighted his pipe, so he rose, and, creaking on tip-toe across the

kitchen, like a man coming late into church, stealthily reached down his pipe and tobacco pouch from the mantelpiece, and returned to his chair prepared for the utmost. Temple was denied the solace of a pipe, but he tried hard to catch Borradale's eye, and made signs to him to bring him paper and pencil, that he might occupy his restless fingers with drawing, and so prevent unseemly fidgeting. But Borradale was absorbed in lighting his pipe, and did not notice his friend's signals of distress, and now it was Temple's turn to creak across the kitchen in quest of the means of occupation that would calm him, without being disrespectful to the poet.

Norton's monotonous tones had a strangely sleepy effect on his hearers, and he dropped his voice at the end of each sentence so that the last word was generally lost, and yet his friends were never once sufficiently interested in the poem to wonder what word they had missed. On and on went the voice in a quiet

stream of sound. The candles burnt low in their sockets, and the air of the room grew misty and pungent from tobacco smoke. The grenadier clock had cleared its throat and shouted eleven, and Temple and Borradale's eyes burnt with sleep, as tho' it were three o'clock in the morning. Norton showed no symptoms of fatigue, and Temple began to feel, as he suppressed his fiftieth yawn, that they might be kept the whole night in this spell-bound state of suspended animation. He had not caught Borradale's eye since the reading began. He was not even sure whether his friend was awake, for he leaned back in his chair with closed eyes, smoking with a quiet regularity that might just as easily have gone on in his sleep. Temple was silently at work with his pencil. He had made and erased a dozen sketches of Bessie Jarvis, none of them in the least satisfying his fastidious eye. Something, indeed, of her pure loveliness of outline he had secured, but it fell so lament-

ably short of the beautiful reality that he became disgusted with his efforts and tore the sketch to pieces.

For a whole hour he had ceased to hear Norton's reading in any other sense than as a sound, rather soothing than otherwise. And Borradale had not listened at all after the first few lines, but withdrew himself into the inner recesses of his own mind, and sat with closed eyes, calling up many a pleasant picture before his mental vision. But even Book V. of the 'Satire on the Human Race' must draw to an end, and, as the cask runs slowly at the last, Norton's voice became exceedingly measured and deliberate towards the close, then stopped suddenly, and nothing was heard but the stertorous breathing of the poet.

Temple did not like to speak, for, in fact, he had nothing to say, and his fellow-listener gave no sign. Suddenly Borradale broke the silence in a loud, cheerful voice. 'Temple,

when you were in the south of France did you ever see truffle-hunting with pigs?'

A shout of laughter from Temple and the amiable Norton recalled him to things nearer home, and, seizing Norton's hand, Borradale begged his pardon a thousand times for his brutality.

'You are the best-tempered fellow in the world, Norton. In your place I should simply kill a man who behaved as I have done. Let me have a thousand copies of the Satire the moment it is printed, and I will read them all!'

'I shall not publish my poem. It has done me an immensity of good to write it, but, now that it is finished, I don't care for it much more than you do,' and Borradale pretended to wince violently under this gentle rebuke.

CHAPTER VIII.

TERAH JARVIS.

'Thrift is the best means of thriving. This is one of the truths that force themselves on the understanding of very early ages, when it is almost the only means; and few truths are such favourites with that selfish, housewifely shrewdness, which has ever been the chief parent and retailer of proverbs.' —*Guesses at Truth.*

Terah Jarvis, market gardener, had risen to his present position of comfort and independence through the life-long exercise of unflagging industry, accompanied by a grinding parsimony. He was born with a natural turn for thrift. When a mere infant he would secrete crusts from his mother's lean larder, against a future time, when he should be even hungrier than he was at the present moment. Sheer thrift suggested to the young Terah the un-

English idea of saving shoe-leather at the expense of his own skin, by taking off his boots and walking barefoot when he came to a rough piece of the road, so that there was a blessing on his shoes as on those of the Israelites of old. He always had money in his pocket, for he often earned a penny; while he never gave one away, and only occasionally spent one under huge provocation. Before he was six years of age Terah Jarvis knew how to earn his penny, honestly and laboriously. He would follow a rider for miles on the chance of earning an odd copper by holding his horse; he carried parcels, he ran errands, he collected road scrapings; in short, wherever there was a penny to be earned by a small boy, there was Terah to earn that penny, and, having earned it, to lock it up in his money box.

At school maxims of thrift congenial to his spirit were impressed upon him, and received by him as veritable glad tidings. A

favourite text of his in the gospel of thrift was that 'a penny saved is a penny gained,' and he would say it to himself as he dropped a newly-earned penny through the slit of his money box. In Terah's copy-book was written in large text hand, 'Saving is having,' and many a time his laborious pen traced these words, duly accompanied by a sympathetic movement of the tip of the tongue, without his having the remotest notion of their meaning, because he pronounced 'saving' and 'having' as though they rhymed. 'Saving' he felt that he knew something about. It was the leading idea of his life, and it was a delight merely to write the good word. But when the copy asserted that 'Saving is having' Terah was lost in perplexity. What on earth was 'having'? Doubtless some attribute of saving with which he was not as yet acquainted. But one day, his teacher bending over him, and taking Terah's little black-and-red hand in hers to guide his pen in more shapely imitation

of the copy, said as she did so, 'Saving is having,' and a flood of light broke into the child's mind. 'Saving is having!' Saving your penny is neither to spend, lend, nor to give it away; having your penny is to hold it, and keep it under lock and key, so that you may find it when you want it; and thus another text from the gospel of thrift was graven deep in Terah's mind.

Before he was twelve years old his money box was heavy with the accumulated savings of half his life-time. Each coin in his little hoard represented a service rendered, or work done, truly and honestly. Not a single penny had been begged, stolen, or given to him for nothing. Had Terah's pennies gone the usual way of boys' pennies, they would not have grown warm in his hand before he had tested their purchasing powers in regard to bull's-eyes and brandy-balls. But saving was the lad's master passion, and in his estimation the joy of possession far outweighed the

short-lived pleasures of appetite. As the possessor of husbanded thrift Terah was a capitalist, and, though he was unacquainted with any definition of the term 'capital,' he held the thing itself securely enough, which was more to the point.

Terah's father, Jonah Jarvis, was cowman to a well-to-do farmer, but he had never laid by a penny in his life, and he beheld his son's saving turn with wonder and awe. As the boy grew older he feared lest this sentiment should change into a desire to borrow from him, or might even lead to a high-handed paternal act of confiscation. For it occurred to him that a man who habitually turned all his spare pennies into drink would not hesitate, if his own supply of coppers failed, to seize upon those of his son. So at thirteen years of age Terah prudently left his father's house. He took with him his savings, changed into the more portable form of silver coin, and journeyed on foot across country out of

Staffordshire into the heart of Worcestershire, walking fifteen miles each day, and sleeping his heavy, dreamless sleep at night under a haystack or in a barn. Terah had made up his mind where he would go. He would seek employment under Sir John Crowder's Scotch gardener, who had once met him walking barefoot on a rough road, carrying his boots in his hand, and was so struck with the sight that he had stopped the boy to prophesy good of his future, and to tell him that Andrew McDiggen never made a mistake. It is pleasant to be praised for obeying one's instincts, and Terah often thought of the Scotchman's encouraging words, so that when the time came for him to make his start in life he naturally went to the only man who had noticed him and his actions with approval. Footsore and weary, and carrying his boots in his hand as a letter of introduction, Terah presented himself before Andrew McDiggen as the boy whom he had praised

for saving his shoe-leather at the expense of his own skin, and asked him for employment. The Scotchman liked the boy's dogged perseverance and determination, and engaged him to do odd work and to run errands about the place. Here, then, as boy and man, Terah Jarvis remained for more than twelve years, and learnt his trade under McDiggen, who, in addition to having the longest upper lip south of the Tweed, was skilful as a wizard in the production of fruit, flowers, and vegetables, in defiance of the laws of nature, at all times and seasons of the year. In a land of fleshpots and spendthrifts Terah Jarvis's ever-increasing parsimony refreshed the lean soul of Andrew McDiggen. He saw the boy knocking the rusty nails out of the walls to sell for old iron, and he loved him; but when he saw him sell his dinner of roast potatoes and bacon for threepence to a tramp, who, drawn by the savoury smell, looked over the hedge into the garden, he revered him. The frequent ex-

hibition of such congenial traits of character drew the thrifty soul of the Scot towards the lad, and he made his will in favour of Terah Jarvis, appointing him sole heir to all his savings. Andrew McDiggen had the usual number of cousins, many times removed, to be aggrieved by the act, but he recognised in Terah a spiritual kinship that in his estimation outweighed even the ties of relationship. He was a bachelor from motives of thrift, because he had never met with a woman so stricken in years as to save him the expense of a family, and at the same time with a sufficient 'tocher' to induce him to marry her. But no son that might have been born to McDiggen could have resembled him more closely in all essentials than did Terah Jarvis. So he took the bold step of ignoring the claims and disappointing the expectations of the McDiggens, the McGrabs, and the McClaws in far away Linlithgow, and made the young Englishman his heir. He had seen that Terah was not

the man either to waste, spend, or give away one penny of the hoard he had spent his life in scraping together. Andrew McDiggen was a man of prompt action, and never wasted a moment of time, and when death summoned him he did not keep him waiting. As the end drew near he pressed Terah's hand, and, whispering, 'Ne'er loose the siller, lad,' he died cheaply before a doctor could be sent for.

At five-and-twenty years of age Terah Jarvis was a wealthy man. He was not only possessed of his own savings, but also of the husbanded thrift of his friend, which amounted to more than five hundred pounds in ready money. He did not allow his fortune to alter his habits in a single respect; he worked as hard as he had ever done, and remained in Sir John Crowder's employ for a year after McDiggen's death. Terah Jarvis was not popular with his fellow-workmen, but he bore a high character among them for

abstention from every vice that entails the spending of a penny. The cheap sins that the poorest may indulge in, such as envy, hatred, lying, and injustice, he did occasionally fall into; but, had he been punished on the spot by a fine, he would not have offended a second time. He once got drunk at another man's expense, and distinctly enjoyed so doing; but, as the after-payment, in the shape of next day's headache, had to be racked out in his own brain and not in his friend's, Terah was never again known widely to diverge from the path of sobriety.

The windfall of McDiggen's legacy, for which Terah Jarvis had not worked a stroke, very nearly led him into a hasty and unthrifty act, and in later life he looked back with a shudder on the danger at that time threatening him. He almost thought of marrying the pretty laundrymaid, whom he had secretly admired for years! But after a brief struggle with the natural

man counsels of economy prevailed, and Terah determined to set aside all thoughts of marriage, and to labour to increase his means by going into business on his own account as a market gardener. Sometime, if he prospered, when he was a middle-aged man, he would discreetly choose a wife of a suitable age, and one who he was assured, according to her poor light and inferior intelligence, had been as saving as himself. Such a one in the fulness of time he met with unexpectedly, cheapening onions at a stall in Bridgnorth market. Terah Jarvis stood spell-bound while he listened to her torrent of expostulation. He noted the gesture with which she one moment grasped the bunch of onions, as though she had overborne the seller's objection to part with it at the buyer's price, and then threw it contemptuously down again, and went about her other marketings only to return later, invigorated for the fray. He noted how the thrifty and intrepid woman

inquired the price of onions at every other stall in the market, and then returned, fortified by argument and invective, to beat down the price of the particular bunch of onions she had set her heart on from the first. At length, to get rid of her, for the woman prevented any other customers from buying while she wrangled over her bargain, the stallkeeper threw the onions into her apron at her own price, telling her they weren't onions, but the bread out of his mouth, that she was taking, and she bore them away in triumph. Terah Jarvis knew very little about women or their ways, but he thought he had never seen the female character displayed to so much advantage. 'That is the woman for my wife,' he said, and in less than six months Harriett Wylie had given up her situation as housekeeper to a farmer in the neighbourhood, and had become Mrs. Jarvis. During their brief courtship Terah carefully explained to her his financial position, and she showed him

her savings' bank book, containing sundry snug little deposits extending over many years. Terah was pleased with the total of her savings, though he would not have liked a wife richer than himself, for that would have wounded his sense of independence, and imperilled his position of master in his own house.

His marriage turned out as well as he expected it to do. Terah's ideal was of easy attainment. His aspirations were low-pitched, of the earth earthy, so that if he never knew any high enjoyment he seldom suffered the pangs of disappointment. Harriett Wylie was the kind of woman he had determined to marry, and he had married her and she answered his requirements: what more could he want? Two daughters were borne to him, Harriett and Elizabeth, and Terah was a very proud father; but he would have liked one of his children to have been a son, that he might have settled the vexed question which is the

cheaper child to bring up, a boy or a girl. As time went on, and his daughters grew into handsome, headstrong girls, and his business prospered, Mrs. Jarvis kept house on a more liberal scale than she had done in their early married life. At first, when Terah saw a joint on the table, he predicted ruin and the workhouse for himself, his family, and their remotest posterity. But his wife and daughters, who knew that he was very well-to-do, had made up their minds that they would live like their neighbours, and had decided that in the important matter of food it was no longer necessary to exercise a grinding economy. Terah was in a hopeless minority in his household when his womankind chose to enter into a league against him, so with many a bitter grumble and prophetic head-shaking he had to give way, and finally to live in the rough plenty usual among men of his station. But beyond this point he could neither be coaxed nor driven into relaxing his economies.

If Terah had remained a bachelor he would never have cared to live better than he did when he was working under McDiggen. The change to the present homely abundance of his table was to please his family, not himself, for he was a most indulgent father, and proud of the quantity of roast pork and apple sauce that his little girls consumed. So he concentrated his saving faculties upon his own clothing, and wore such a coat and hat as only a prosperous niggard dares to wear. The worst quarrel Terah ever had with his wife was when she gave away an old coat of his, which, if it had had a new back, half a front, and one fresh sleeve, might have been worn for a twelvemonth longer. Both Harriett and Elizabeth Jarvis were girls that any father might be proud of, but Bessie, who was four years younger than her elder sister, was decidedly very handsome. It was a mystery how the sharp-nosed, ferret-eyed Terah Jarvis should be the father of such daughters, nor

when one looked at their mother was it at all more explicable. Her features were commonplace and insignificant, but her face wore an expression that arrested one's attention. To him who can read the outward sign of the inner nature infallibility was stamped on Mrs. Jarvis's brow. She went through life untroubled by a doubt as to the fulness of her knowledge or the soundness of her judgment. She had no misgivings of self, and was supported in every crisis by heartfelt approbation of her own conduct. Her youngest daughter inherited the germ of this expression of face, kept in check by her sweet young beauty, but only waiting time to develop in full perfection. Had the Jarvises and the Wylies possessed family portraits for some three or four centuries back, it might have been seen from whence the girls derived their beauty. There might have been among them some lovely, dark-eyed ancestress who had transmitted her glowing tints to Harriett, or some

fair and stately beauty whose perfect features had descended to Bessie. Both the girls were headstrong and self-willed, and spoiled and indulged by their parents. Their mother, who alternately scolded and petted them, had failed to impress herself upon them by precept or example, for neither of her daughters followed in her industrious footsteps. The girls had many sweethearts, and Mrs. Jarvis took a foolish pleasure in counting up the number of their admirers, as being in some vague way a compliment to herself. Terah frequently warned his wife with the utmost candour: 'You'll get into trouble with your girls, missis. If they was boys I'd see to 'em myself, but women had ought to know women's ways, so you must look after 'em, and teach 'em to know theirselves.' It was not much to be wondered at when poor, pretty, empty-headed Harriett brought shame upon her home. At first her mother was furious, but soon came to view the whole disgrace as one of the evils of life

which you are lucky to escape, but which, like scarlet fever and the measles, cannot always be avoided. Her father took a different tone. He was for turning his daughter out into the wide world, or sending her to the workhouse, till he found that the father of her child was able and willing to pay for its maintenance. Then the whole wretched affair assumed a very different aspect to Terah. He was sore and angry about it, and determined that better care should be taken of Bessie; but still it was not the thriftless business that he had feared, for it did not cost him personally a single shilling. Harriett's 'misfortune,' as her family called it, did not prevent her from marrying respectably. When her child was a year old she married and settled in the north of England, leaving little Jack at home, where the grandfather was mollified by the regular receipt of money for his maintenance, and the grandmother looked upon him as an infant prodigy.

At twenty years of age Bessie Jarvis was a very different girl from her sister, and not exposed to the same class of danger. She was not better than Harriett had been at her age, her sense of right being based chiefly on custom and expediency, and a young and shallow-hearted woman is not likely to evolve high and noble theories of life from her own consciousness. But she had ready tact to discern what the world's code of morality is—how it frowns on Harriett's slip, and smiles its sweetest on a mercenary marriage. She knew as well as any haughty lady how to discourage an unprofitable lover, and she was thought by her neighbours to look very 'high' indeed. She 'walked' with no less a person than Mr. Job Tolley, the headman at Harbottle's cheese and butter shop in Shelton market-place. In Bessie's narrow horizon Job Tolley was the brightest luminary that had yet appeared. He had stood behind the counter in a cheesemonger's shop

in a town in Staffordshire for some years before he came to Shelton, and had acquired an easy familiarity, not to say impudence, of manner, that impressed Bessie favourably, as being in strong contrast to the awkward shyness of her rustic admirers. Tolley was a very pressing man of business, and had made himself essential to his employer, and a partnership was hinted at, with a view to securing his services permanently. Harbottle had an only child, a daughter, and all Shelton expected Job Tolley to marry Amelia and to be taken into the business at once. But, though this would have been very obviously to his advantage, there were other and more powerful attractions at work, and Amelia Harbottle had the bitterness of seeing Job Tolley walk home from church every Sunday with Bessie Jarvis. There was no definite engagement between Bessie and Job, but she thought that, supposing he was taken into partnership with his master, and became a well-to-do trades-

man, and she married him, she would not have to work as hard as her mother did, but she would keep a servant, and wear a purple silk dress in the afternoon, and sit with her crochet in the parlour window, watching the people in the market-place. As for Job Tolley, he had not yet made up his mind to which of his admirers he would throw the handkerchief. It was necessary to keep on good terms with Amelia, because he lived in her father's house, and her goodwill procured him many little comforts he must otherwise have gone without. But he was fascinated by Bessie's beauty, and enjoyed walking out of an evening to a hot supper at Jarvis's after the shop was shut. And Bessie was by no means averse to an admirer who so far committed her to nothing. If he had not yet asked her to be his wife, she had the comfort of knowing that neither had he asked Amelia Harbottle. Whether she became

Mrs. Tolley or not, Job's attentions gave her something to think about in her narrow world, and made her an object of jealousy to all the young women of her acquaintance.

CHAPTER IX.

BORRADALE IS ANXIOUS FOR HIS FRIEND.

NEXT morning at breakfast Borradale's uneasy conscience suggested to him that it would be polite to introduce the subject of his friend's poem. So, having glanced at the daily paper, and finding it barren beyond all precedent, he threw it aside and said, 'My dear Norton, it is a riddle to me how a man so amiable as you are can hold such an evil opinion of mankind in general as you certainly do, if one may judge from Book V. of your Satire.'

'I admit it is puzzling on the surface of things,' replied Norton, 'and I am aware that I do not live up to my creed, being rather a

humane sort of man than otherwise. But in that I resemble many another, who is not able to make his life square with his belief.'

'Luckily for us, you are better than your creed,' said Borradale. Then, turning to Temple, who was boiling the eggs, he said, 'Who shall decide which is the real Norton, the bitter, misanthropic satirist, or the angelically amiable Norton who graces our table, though he cannot help to prepare our meals?'

'I do not think that amiability or misanthropy alone compose any man's nature,' said Temple, seating himself at the table. 'We are none of us all black or all white, but in each of us there are blended a thousand shades of character.'

'That accounts for the prevailing neutral tint of mind,' said Norton, who was very young for his age, and felt bound to maintain his cheap reputation for misanthropy. 'What can be duller than man?'

'Woman, my dear fellow,' said Borradale with the utmost cheerfulness.

'I can't agree with you there,' said Temple. 'Two of the brightest, most entertaining creatures I know are women.'

'You happy man! Lose no time in binding them to you in indissoluble bonds. If the laws of our country permitted, I would say, marry them both to-morrow!'

'The one is my sister, and the other is my friend,' said Temple, laughing.

'Then you are still happier than I thought because you may enjoy their society for life merely by marrying your friend, for your sister is yours always,' and Borradale heaved the ghost of a sigh. 'If ever I take the dread step of marrying,' he continued, 'my wife shall be a companionable woman with a sense of humour, rather than "the most beautiful creature God ever made,"' and as he quoted Temple's words of last night he shot a keen glance at his friend.

Temple's colour rose as he replied, 'Why not try to find beauty and humour combined?'

'It can't be done, my dear fellow! The thing is impossible. Never has been. Beauty in itself is gift enough for any one woman, and she had better hold her tongue and be thankful, and attempt nothing further. But this brings me round to personal matters, and what I want to say is this, that it is hard on a man when his womenkind have neither wit nor good looks. I give you my word of honour that my seven estimable sisters are among the least humorous and plainest young persons I have met with in the course of my life.'

His friends laughed heartily at his candour.

'But yours is a brother's estimate, and I don't suppose that other men are of your opinion,' said Norton.

'Looks like it, my dear fellow, looks very

much like it, when six of them are unmarried, though each of my sisters has money, and we have the usual number of curates in the neighbourhood,' and Borradale spoke in so dejected a tone that Temple patted him on the shoulder encouragingly and urged him to bear up like a man.

'It's all very well for you and Norton, who have only one sister between you, but I assure you it is no joke to be in a perpetual minority in your own house. I am out-voted by my female population on every possible question, and it is not pleasant for a permanence.'

'Now is the time to shew your philosophy or rather your politics,' said Norton, 'and to believe in the infallibility of the majority.'

'All very fine, my dear Norton, but you can't apply the principles of popular government in domestic life. A family can only be governed on strictly monarchical principles. The late king, my father, being dead, I reign in his stead, and I and my mother should be

the king and queen of the family. But nothing of the kind. I am swamped by numbers, and my authority is laughed at, when I ought to reign supreme in my own realm.'

'Perhaps your sisters, all being older than you are, do not recognise the authority of a junior,' suggested Temple.

'Age has nothing to do with it. Kingdoms obey young monarchs because they recognise their right to rule, and I ask no more of my sisters than that they should recognise my authority. King in my own realm, master of my own house! I am nothing but the nominal head of an unruly republic. The girls are fond enough of me, I don't deny it; they are oppressively fond of me,—but where's my authority? That's what I want to know;' and, as Temple and Norton laughed at his gravity and earnestness, he suddenly broke into a laugh too, and by way of changing the subject said, 'What are you going to do with yourself to-day, Temple?'.

'Oh, I intend to walk over to Shelton, and to potter about the old town. And you?'

'I shall go out with Norton in the morning, and later on fetch the lettuces from old Jarvis's.'

Heavy thunder-showers interfered with the morning's plans, but the afternoon proved brilliantly fine; the hot July sun soon dried the wet roads, and Laurence walked to Shelton as he had proposed. Norton chose to stay in and write letters, so that Borradale was left to go alone to the Jarvises, ostensibly in quest of salad, but really in expectation of seeing the gardener's pretty daughters once more. It was six years since he had seen them last, and he found it difficult to realise that the handsome little Bessie must now be twenty and Harriett twenty-four years old. He smiled at the recollection of Bessie's schoolboy-like capacity for eating fruit and sweets, though there were other memories Borradale had of her, which could not pro-

voke mirth. The cottage in the nursery gardens stood unchanged, and the great beech-tree sheltering it looked not a leaf higher or broader than he remembered it six years ago. Borradale opened the gate and soon was standing in the porch, where Mrs. Jarvis, attracted by the click of the latch, came to meet him.

'Well, Mrs. Jarvis, how are you?' he said cordially; 'what, don't you remember me?'

'La! if it isn't Mr. Borradale growed into a gentleman,' said Mrs. Jarvis in a tone of pleased astonishment, wiping her warm hand with her apron before she shook hands with him. 'There was a gentleman here last night after some lettuces, a friend of yours, as said you was coming to see us. Step in, sir, step in; your ma must be proud to see what a gentleman they've made of you at Cambridge college.'

'I'm more changed than you in the last six years, Mrs. Jarvis. Why, I declare you

are growing downhill, you look younger and younger.'

Mrs. Jarvis bridled with pleasure at his complimentary sallies, till the red-cotton poppies in her cap nodded and shook. Borradale had interrupted her in her ironing, an event that usually acted as an irritant to her temper, but he had been a prime favourite with her, and the elderly woman who could withstand his genial good-humour must be a shrew of the most acrid description. Though there was a fire in the kitchen, to heat the irons, it was cooler indoors than in the open air. On the hearth lay stretched a fox-terrier, fast asleep, and apparently dreaming vividly of pursuit and fighting, uttering now and then a strangled growl, and his legs working with a spell-bound and thwarted action.

As Mrs. Jarvis drew forward the high-backed arm-chair for her guest she looked at the dog, and said, 'If that isn't for all the world how Father carried on in his sleep when

he'd took and raised the rent of the cottages, and we had 'em standing void on our hands for six months!' and she gave the animal a sharp push with her foot that roused him effectually. 'Won't you let me fetch you a glass of my own made cowslip wine, Mr. Borradale? You'd used to be very fond of it.'

'So I am still, my dear Mrs. Jarvis; I've tasted nothing like it since I was last here. But I am so hot with walking in the sun, I dare not take wine. May I ask you for a glass of milk?'

'You may ask and 'ave, sir, though I couldn't fancy milk with a moustache myself,' and she bustled out of the kitchen, intent on hospitality, and returned quickly with a tumbler of milk in her hand, and accompanied by a very fat little boy, of about five years of age, holding on by her gown. Borradale emptied the glass at a draught, and, sitting down, drew the lad towards him, and held him fast between his knees and made faces at

him, and worked his black eyebrows rapidly up and down to find out whether nerves of any kind formed a part of the fat child's composition. Apparently they did not, for he never winced under the ordeal.

'Good boy, you'll do,' said Borradale encouragingly; 'whose little boy is he?'

'Why, sir, he's our 'Arriett's little Jack,' said Mrs. Jarvis from her ironing table.

'Harriett's son! I didn't even know that she was married.'

'Well, no, sir, she wasn't exactly to call married. But no one can say as the little lad's stood in her way, for she's married very respectable to a draper's traveller as was all among the ribbins, afore Jack was a twelvemonth old. It took our 'Arriett by surprise like, it put her about a good bit. But I said to her, "It's a misfortune as may happen to any of us, and there's no saying whose turn it may be next." For I never was one to cry over spilt milk. So she heartened up wonder-

ful, and it's all for the best seemingly. Little Jack, he's a gallus little chap, he is, and he scares the birds off his grandfather's strawberries wonderful; but he eats a many of 'em hisself, he do,' and his grandmother looked proudly at him as she flattened his hair on his brow, gave a tug to his pinafore, which was hitched up round his waist, and bade him make his bow to the gentleman.

Borradale looked full in the child's absurd face with its round eyes and long upper lip, and returned his salute with gravity.

'Oh, he's a deep little chap, he is,' continued the fond grandmother; 'our 'Arriett wanted to 'a called him Terah after her father, but I said no. Coming i' that way as he happens to a' come, Bible names is not for the likes of him. Call 'im William, or John, or George—any o' them plain names does well enough for them as can't hope to cut their teeth on a wedding ring. But Bible names is for Bible ways, although it was my own

child. No, I says, right is right, and I will prevail.'

'But, my good Mrs. Jarvis, John is a Bible name as well as Terah. You know there was a John among the twelve Apostles.'

Mrs. Jarvis looked at Borradale keenly, with her head slightly on one side, as though weighing his assertion. She was not given to reconsidering an opinion when once she had formed it, and, having long ago made up her mind that John was not a Bible name, she replied politely, but with decision, 'The twelve Apostles was free to call theirselves by this name or by that, but I've never been used to consider as neither John nor William was Bible names, and have acted according,' and as an end of all argument Mrs. Jarvis set her iron down with rather more emphasis than was necessary.

It would have been vain to offer her demonstration of the fact that the name John is to be found in the Bible. The Arch-

bishop of Canterbury and the Pope might both have assured her that she was wrong, and she would have listened to them with the outward deference due to her superiors; but she would have remained completely and calmly inaccessible to proof or to argument. Mrs. Jarvis had made up her mind. Borradale wished he was half as sure of anything as Mrs. Jarvis was that John was not a Bible name. If only for ten minutes, he would have liked to know what the feeling is of absolute certainty on any subject, to the entire exclusion of all side lights thrown upon it by reason or candour.

'Well, Mrs. Jarvis, there's nothing like being positive, and when Jack's older, if he'll look in the Bible to see if the name John is there, I'll give him a shilling if he can't find it.'

''Ark! Jack,' said his grandmother suddenly as voices were heard in the garden; 'there's grandfather. Run and meet him and your Aunt Bessie.'

The boy had not far to run, for they were already at the porch, and Bessie and her father entered the house, followed by Temple. Borradale fancied that his friend's face fell when he found him there, and he looked so surprised to see Temple that his expression was in effect a direct question.

'I met Mr. Jarvis and his daughter on the Shelton road,' Temple volunteered, as though explaining his arrival.

He evidently had done so, and turned back with them for the sake of walking for a couple of miles by the silent Bessie, while her father poured forth to him the overflow of his loquacious egotism. As the fair, golden-haired girl entered the house like a ray of sunshine Borradale mentally conceded to Temple that Bessie was beautiful, yes, very beautiful, even if he could not dogmatically assert that she was 'the most beautiful creature God ever made.' He paid the homage of a full recognition of her youthful loveliness, but his

admiration was tempered by the suspicion that it veiled a hard and unfeeling disposition. He remembered vividly a display of cruel temper when Bessie was a young girl, and the revulsion with which it had filled his whole mind. He was in Terah Jarvis's garden one pleasant day in the early summer when Bessie found a nest full of young thrushes, fluttering their unfledged wings, all agape for food, which the parent birds had flown to fetch. She showed the nest to Borradale, grumbling bitterly that the birds ate her father's strawberries.

'It's shameful how they eat our fruit, just as if it was growed for them.'

'Don't grudge them a few strawberries, Bessie, they will repay you with their songs,' said Borradale.

'Do you call that paying us? I'd rather eat strawberries than listen to all the thrushes that ever sang,' and before he could stop her, or even know what she was about to do, the

young girl had tumbled the naked fledglings out of the nest on the hard gravel path, and stamped on them with her strong boots.

Borradale seized her by the wrist. 'What did you do that for, you cruel little devil?'

'Who's cruel now, pinching my wrist black and blue? Let go, will you?' And Borradale flung her hand from him with disgust.

'I never saw a crueller, more unwomanly deed in my life,' he said.

'I'm only a girl, I'm not a woman.'

'And you never will be while you have such a hard heart,' and he turned away from her, and left the garden, slamming the gate behind him.

With this memory still fresh in his mind, Borradale rose to meet Bessie.

'I should have known you again anywhere,' he said, 'though you wore a pinafore when last I saw you, and I should be afraid to offer you a necklace from Shelton Fair now.'

Bessie blushed prettily, and gave him an awkward shake of the hand, which he would have known in the dark as that of an entirely uncultivated person, though the curtesy that accompanied the attempt was not without a rustic grace.

'I'm sure, Mr. Borradale, it's very kind of you to come and see us.'

'Well, to be sure,' said Terah Jarvis, offering Borradale a hand so gnarled by rheumatism, and coarsened by hard work, that it resembled in form and texture some strange earth-root; 'well, to be sure, if this ain't young Mr. Borradale growed amazing. Why, you've not visited these parts for years; we'd a'most forgot what you was like, young people changes so.'

'There you have the advantage of me,' said Borradale, 'for I was just telling Mrs. Jarvis she isn't changed a bit in these six years—neither are you, that I can see.'

Terah shook his head repeatedly, though

he smiled at the implied compliment; 'that won't do, Mr. Borradale, that won't do. Both me and my missis has seen 'ears over our heads.'

'Nobody else sees them,' said Borradale cheerily; 'you are a couple of evergreens, as a gardener and his wife ought to be. But tell me how the world has used you since we met? How is trade?'

'Why, Mr. Borradale, don't you think o' going into the market gardening, leastways not in a hungry soil like this, where we could do with a shower o' rain every day, and a shower of muck o' Sundays. There's not much to be made out of the market gardening with seasons like ours. Pertaters is down lower than ever, peas is heart-breaking, tomatoes is very middling, onions is p'r'aps a bit stronger than they was, turnips is depressed, and, as to carrots, you might as well make a present of 'em to the wire-worm straight away, and save a fight over 'em.'

'Good gracious! I'd no idea what a desperate condition vegetables are in! I hope you do better with your fruit,' said Borradale.

'Why, sir, as to the fruit, it's pretty much the same with nuts and apples as it is wi' the damsons. If there's a good 'ear of damsons, and they're a cassalty crop, they come that ridiculous plentiful, it don't pay the wind to blow 'em down, and if there comes a year when folks 'ud give a matter of thirty shilling a pot for 'em, then there ain't enough in the parish not to'—and Mr. Jarvis paused for a simile, and then, pointing with his gnarled thumb in the direction of his grandson—'there ain't enough damsons in the parish to give our little Jack the belly-ache.'

Borradale looked at Temple to see if he was listening, but apparently he heard nothing of the conversation his friend was so thoroughly enjoying. He was absorbed in gazing at Bessie Jarvis as she stood before him with downcast eyes, dangling her bonnet by its

strings. The light from the window fell on her shining hair, and showed the pure outline of her profile in strong relief. A hard smile curved her handsome lips, and Temple was speaking to her in low tones. Borradale was uneasy. An indefinable fear of impending evil came upon him. He was perfectly familiar with Temple's Utopian views on the subject of marriage, and he was always ready to discuss them with his friend so long as they were merely theoretical, but his mind revolted when it occurred to him that he might wish to put them in practice.

'Temple,' he said, 'come into the garden with Mr. Jarvis and me, and choose some lettuces.'

'You don't need me to help you,' he replied without stirring.

Borradale looked at him, his observing faculties sharpened by affection for his friend, and he wished that he had never brought him to Shelton, or introduced him to the Jarvises.

'It is time for us to be going,' he said as he rose, but Temple did not seem to hear him; so he bade good-bye to Bessie and her mother, and went with Terah into the garden to cut the lettuces. Borradale had looked at Bessie with the utmost admiration, but the feeling excited by her bright young beauty ended at that point. He read coldness in her fine eyes, hardness and self-complacency in the outline of her beautiful mouth. Borradale was a free man, unfettered by preconceived ideas of the simplicity and unworldliness that should belong to a girl in Bessie Jarvis's position in life; no glamour was thrown around her by his own imagination, so that he was able to see her as she really was. And the sight was a goodly one, without seeking to add false lustre to it by attributing to her noble qualities, which existed only in the imagination of the beholder. If he wronged the girl by the impression she produced upon him, Borradale still held it impossible that she could be worthy of the

love of Laurence Temple. He tried to persuade himself that his friend was only smitten by Bessie's beauty, as a young man might be, but he knew him to be too chivalrous to take advantage of Bessie Jarvis's social position to pay her attentions which might mean nothing to him, but that would compromise her. If Temple had any feeling for Bessie beyond simple admiration of her beauty, Borradale was sure that it was a serious one, with which his friends and the world would soon be acquainted.

CHAPTER X.

JARVIS ANXIOUS FOR HIS DAUGHTER

During the following fortnight the uneasiness that had seized on Borradale with regard to his friend was very much increased. He saw that Temple had fallen deeply in love with Bessie Jarvis; but he did not think that if she had been a lady her dull, heavy nature would have attracted him, even allowing for her great beauty. But, fettered as Temple was by the views he held, a glamour was thrown over her by the mere fact that she belonged to a lower grade of life than his own. If Bessie had been a loving and warm-hearted woman, Borradale would have overcome his repugnance to the idea of Temple making her his wife, and have hoped that his

friend would be happy in her affection. But to him the light in Bessie's fine blue eyes was icy cold, and he could not trust the temper lurking in the corners of her handsome mouth. There were occasions, too, on which Borradale had seen her close her clear-cut lips with an expression only comparable to that of the four-footed type of all obstinacy—the mule. It was not in his nature to take refuge in saying, 'It is no affair of mine,' for where Temple's happiness was concerned he neither felt, nor could affect to feel, indifference.

A great change had come over his friend since the fatal evening when he had first visited Terah Jarvis's nursery garden. He was moody and absent-minded during the short time he now spent with Borradale and Norton, and he was evidently taking counsel with himself on some absorbing matter, concerning which he did not care to ask their opinion or advice. They could only marvel at the effect produced on their friend by his

meeting with Bessie Jarvis; and Borradale, as he mused on the change wrought in him by so inadequate a cause, thought, if it had been Norton who had made such an ass of himself, he should not have been so much surprised; while Norton, in his turn, said to himself, 'I could sooner have imagined Borradale playing the fool than Temple.'

Laurence spent so much of his time at the Jarvises' that others besides his friends perceived the attraction that drew him thither. Bessie was the first to know what brought Mr. Temple so often to the house; for, though her sense was not keen in other directions, it was unerringly quick and true where self was concerned. It was a novel sensation to find herself the object of the deep admiration of a man like Laurence Temple. To be sure, it was not lively, and personally she distinctly preferred Job Tolley or Borradale to Temple, for they amused her, and made her laugh; but it was a distinction to be visited by a

gentleman who treated her with as much respect as though she were a great lady, and the very novelty of the circumstance was its principal charm. It was not long before Bessie's parents, made anxious by the care of their daughter, began to suspect the cause of Mr. Temple's constant visits to the cottage, and the discovery cost them many a wakeful hour.

'Mother,' said Terah, as he tossed to and fro on his pillow, that was stuffed so full of paternal fears and anxieties that his old head could find no place of rest on it; 'Mother, it ain't common for a gentleman like Mr. Temple to come after a girl like our Bessie.'

'But he's in love with the girl, Terah, if ever I see a man in love.'

'Mother, I won't have our 'Arriett's doings over again here. If Mr. Temple means honest, he must marry our Bessie sharp, and if he don't he must be started off about his business afore mischief comes of it.'

'Aye, we can't do with no more little Jacks 'ere.'

'Mother, do you think our Bessie cares for Mr. Temple?' asked Terah after a pause, in which he had turned a fresh surface of cool pillow to his burning brow.

'Why, no, father, not same as she cares for Job Tolley. Mr Temple ain't our sort. But he's a gentleman, and they say he's got a deal of money, and if he marries our Bessie he'll make a lady of her. But he must speak out. If he don't he's only keepin' them away as would marry her sharp enough. Father, can't you ask him what he wants wi' following our girl?'

'No, mother, I can't. It's none so easy to ask a gentleman like him such a question. But I've a mind to go and talk to Mr. Borradale about it.'

'Aye, do, father; just step up to the cottage to-morrow, and take him some nice fresh vegetables. You can bring in the question

easy and natural like along of a dish o' French beans.'

'Well, Mr. Borradale 'll tell me plain and honest what it all means, for I'll be hanged if I know myself. I've got to look after my girl, I know that;' and Terah Jarvis maundered off into the world of dreams, with a troubled sense that his headstrong daughter was rushing into peril. From the time of the anxious father recorded in the Apocrypha, down through countless generations of grey heads and furrowed brows, to Terah Jarvis in the latter half of the nineteenth century, who shall count the number or estimate the bitterness of paternal vigils?

The next day one of the three friends at the cottage was abruptly called away, and Borradale was not sorry that the month they had covenanted to spend together was drawing to an end. Norton's father had telegraphed to him to go up to town at once to receive his instructions for an immediate business journey

to Germany. Laurence was, as usual, at the Jarvises' cottage when Norton received his summons, and he had barely time to catch the one quick train of the day without running a mile to bid his friend good-bye.

'I wish with all my heart we'd never come to this confounded place,' said Norton, red in the face with vainly endeavouring to draw together his bulging and ill-packed portmanteau. 'I believe Temple is going to make a fool of himself with that handsome icicle at old Jarvis's.'

'Yes; I wish it were you, my dear fellow, instead of Temple.'

'Or you, Borradale, who are in the condition—so bad for your soul—of never having made a fool of yourself yet;' and Norton looked up from stooping over his portmanteau with flushed face, and glaring defiance through his eye-glass.

'Give me time, and no doubt I shall satisfy my best friends in that respect. But you are

a poet, Norton ; you ought to admire a love-match such as Temple contemplates.'

'It takes two to a love-match, and I only know the gentleman's state of mind.'

'If this idiotic affair does end in a marriage, one must hope that Bessie is as much in love with Temple as he is with her,' said Borradale ; 'but I detest the whole thing, and I can't think any good can come of it.'

'Temple is much too good a fellow to perish by this particular form of suicide when there is such a wide choice of means of destruction. And to look at the practical side of it—and in this topsy-turvy world that's the side of a love-match that insists on coming uppermost—just imagine Terah Jarvis and his wife as Temple's father and mother-in-law!' said Norton slowly and with emphasis.

'Don't!' said Borradale, drawing in his breath between his closed teeth, 'it shudders me to think of it.'

When Borradale returned to the cottage

from seeing Norton off at Shelton station he was surprised to see Terah Jarvis standing in the porch with a basket of vegetables on his arm. He was looking old and pinched, and more cunning than ever, as he touched his hat and stood aside while Borradale opened the door and asked him to enter.

'Well, Mr. Borradale, it wouldn't be manners to say no, since you are so pressing. I've just stepped round to bring you a matter of a biling o' French beans, as my missus thought 'ud eat uncommon sweet with a bit o' boiled ham.'

'It's very kind of you, Jarvis. There will only be two of us to enjoy it now, for I have just been seeing Mr. Norton off for London.'

'Dear me! to think as there's only two of you,' said Terah, scratching the back of his head while he considered how he should lead the conversation in the direction he wished. 'Now I should ha' said, if I'd been asked, as there'd mostly been only two of you for some

time past,' and the old man endeavoured to throw a look of lamb-like innocence into his ferrety countenance as he spoke.

'How do you mean? My two friends and myself make three, don't we?' said Borradale.

'Aye, when you're all together you do, right enough. But Mr. Temple ain't been much with you and Mr. Norton lately, I'm thinking,' and Terah's face assumed its native expression of cunning as he spoke.

'I can't see that it is any concern of yours whether Mr. Temple is much with us or not,' Borradale remarked coldly.

'That's just where you make a mistake, sir, for Mr. Temple's at my house most of the time, and it concerns me to know what he comes for.'

Borradale's swarthy face grew very red. 'Perhaps you had better ask him that yourself.'

'That's what my missis said. But I know

you a deal better than Mr. Temple, and you're comfortabler like to talk with than him. He comes to my house constant, but it ain't to see me, and it ain't to see the missus, nor it ain't to see little Jack. He comes a purpose to see our Bessie, and if she's out he don't stop five minutes to speak a civil word to abody,' and Terah Jarvis looked hard at Borradale with his small, sharp, close-set eyes.

'Well?' said Borradale drily, for he disliked the conversation extremely.

'Well, sir, I'm Bessie's father, I am, and I want to know what brings a gentleman like Mr. Temple after my girl.'

'A most natural question, Jarvis, but I am not the person of whom you should ask it.'

'You're Mr. Temple's friend, sir, and I thought you could speak up for him. We should never a-knowed him but for you.'

Borradale felt very keenly the responsibility implied in Terah's remark, and he could cer-

tainly speak up for his friend, so he said warmly:

'Mr. Temple is a man of perfect honour, you need have no fear about his visits. He will respect your daughter as he would a young lady in his own rank of life; of that I am sure.'

Terah Jarvis looked vastly relieved, and turned his hat round and round in his hands.

'You put heart into me, sir, you do. It's an uncommon anxious thing to look after, is a girl. We'd trouble with our eldest,' he said, pursing up his mouth, and nodding mysteriously. 'You can't tell what it is to have the care of a daughter set heavy on your mind o' nights.'

'That crowning anxiety is spared me,' said Borradale, rejoicing that the conversation was diverted from the subject of his friend; and, wishful to lead it further afield, he continued gravely, 'But I have my anxieties, too. I have a widowed mother, one grandmother,

two aunts, seven sisters, and two young nieces to look after, and the strain upon me is something tremendous.'

'Lord a' mercy upon you, sir! I'll never complain to you no more of the care o' womenfolk. It's wonderful how you keep your health and spirits. I hope you'll bear up, sir, and keep a good heart,' and Terah shook hands with him slowly and emphatically, and, having set out the vegetables in tempting array on the dresser, he was departing with the empty basket on his arm when Borradale called to him to stop.

'It's my turn to ask you a question now, Jarvis. You are anxious for your daughter, and I am no less anxious for my friend. I want you to tell me if Bessie has a lover already?' Terah started very naturally, as though the idea were an entirely new one to him.

'Has my Bessie got a lover, Mr. Borradale? Well, I can't say but that there's

young men as is willing to walk with a pretty girl, but she holds her head very 'igh, and keeps herself to herself.'

'That's hardly an answer to my question. I must make it still plainer and ask you if your daughter "walks," as it is called, with a young man of the name of Job Tolley, from Harbottle's cheese and butter shop?'

'Well, sir, this here is very odd,' said Terah Jarvis with an air of the most innocent surprise; 'it is odd as you should happen to a' named the only young man as she has ever took a walk with occasional, but never since Mr. Temple come about the house.'

'Why, I saw her myself last evening walking with this very Tolley in Shelton,' said Borradale.

'Oh no, sir, not walking, nothing of the sort. Bessie 'ad gone to buy some cheese, and Tolley 'ud be carrying it for her; he always was the gentleman, and girls like to be waited on; but for walking, sir, it couldn't

be, for she's took very high since Mr. Temple's been to our house. You won't go naming of it to Mr. Temple, will you, sir?' asked Terah Jarvis, his face contracting with mean anxiety.

Borradale laughed. 'I'll make you no promises, Jarvis. You take care of your daughter, and I'll take care of my friend.'

Over their frugal supper that night, in the absence of a third person, Temple and Borradale grew confidential, and Temple's manner was no longer preoccupied and reserved, but once more open and kindly.

'Are you aware that our month is at an end in three days?' said Borradale, looking at the diminished piece of cheese, and wondering if it would last their time.

'Is it really? I had lost count of days and nights altogether.'

'I thought you had. Norton and I were not so lucky, and time has hung rather heavily on our hands since you have with-

drawn the light of your countenance, and spent so much of the day away from us.'

Temple changed colour and extended his hand towards his friend, smiling a somewhat conscious smile.

'Oh, it's all right,' said Borradale as he grasped it, '*chacun à son goût*, and if you were happier with the Jarvises than with us you were welcome to go there.'

Laurence replied with an apparently irrelevant remark. 'My dear Borradale, I have made up my mind, and I cannot tell you the sense of strength and harmony it gives to my whole nature to know exactly what I intend to do,' and his face wore the kindly, penetrating expression that had so strongly attracted Borradale to him when they had first met.

'And what do you intend to do?' asked Borradale, dreading what he should hear.

'I intend to ask Bessie Jarvis to become my wife. Indeed, I am not acting impulsively.

I have known her for three weeks, and in the growth of ideas and emotions one does not reckon time by any mundane computation, and for all practical purposes I have known her and loved her for years. You know I have always determined I would marry a wife from a lower rank than my own, and whose education I would myself undertake ; and I have found my ideal. Wish me joy,' and Laurence spoke as though his happiness would not be complete without his friend's congratulations.

Borradale was startled by Temple's confession, though he had expected it. He had never loved his friend so well as now, when he saw his great sincerity and goodness of heart—at once his weakness and his strength.

'I do wish you joy,' he said earnestly. 'But you have not yet proposed to Bessie Jarvis. Is it not possible that the three weeks that have been as so many years to you may have been but a simple matter-of-fact three

weeks to her, bringing with it nothing more remarkable than its three Sundays and its three washing days ; and that by speaking so soon you might endanger your chance of success ? '

'I have thought of that,' said Temple, rising, and beginning to pace the kitchen floor. 'Of course I could not for an instant suppose that I have become to her all that she has so suddenly, or rather so seeming suddenly, become to me. I shall not speak to her for another fortnight or so.'

'But you forget, Temple, that we leave this place in three days from now.'

'You do, my dear fellow, but I shall stay on, after you are gone, at the inn in Shelton.'

'You're terribly in earnest if you mean to take a room at the Crown Inn,' said Borradale, smiling.

'I never was so much in earnest in my life,' said Temple, throwing his head back and looking at Borradale with a resolute expres-

sion. 'I will write to you and let you know my fate in about a fortnight's time.'

'Had you not better ascertain whether Bessie Jarvis has not an admirer already in her own rank of life, before you propose for her?' suggested Borradale, his conversation with her father still fresh in his mind.

'Of course there must be many who admire a beautiful girl like Bessie, but I know that she would not encourage them; and that she has no one particular admirer except myself, I feel sure,' said Temple confidently.

'I am not so sure of it,' replied Borradale earnestly. 'There is a fellow called Job Tolley, that I am a little suspicious of, and I wish to put you on your guard.'

Temple laughed at what he considered a superfluous caution. 'I have neither seen nor heard anything of Job Tolley (heavens! what a name!) at the Jarvises'. Bessie would not receive any attentions from me if her dear, innocent heart were not fancy-free.'

'Is she then wholly devoid of the coquetry we sometimes imagine we detect in women of our own rank?' asked Borradale in a very mild voice, and winking his dark eyes rapidly.

'Entirely, I believe. Only think of the simplicity of her surroundings! The world has not had the chance to corrupt her with its tortuous ways. She has lived a beautiful, sheltered life, each day bringing its own pieties, its household duties, and simple pleasures, and it will be my delight to guide and develop a nature fostered by such influences. Of course Bessie is profoundly ignorant on all points of learning, there is everything for me to instruct her in, and nothing in which she can instruct me; and yet, Borradale, I declare she teaches me by her beauty, and by her mere presence all my powers are quickened,' and the young man's face was transfigured by enthusiasm as he spoke.

'Notably your imagination,' thought his friend, but a sigh was all that escaped his lips. 'Heaven grant that his impression of the girl may in the main be right, and mine wholly wrong!' he said to himself.

Borradale pushed his chair back with a harsh, grating sound on the tiled floor, and went to the sideboard for his pipe and tobacco-jar. Temple still walked to and fro with hands crossed behind his back, and head erect.

'What glorious impartiality of nature!' he suddenly exclaimed. 'One would never have expected to find a daughter of Terah Jarvis beautiful in face, sweet and unsophisticated in mind!'

Borradale gave a few impatient puffs at his pipe, and then threw the match with which he had lighted it, still blazing, like a miniature meteor, across the kitchen, and said slowly, 'I never expected to hear you make use of the clap-trap expression "impartiality of

nature." If there is one thing that nature is not, it is impartial. On the contrary, she is grossly partial, and full of open favouritism. She gives to one woman beauty that men run mad after, while to another she gives a face to frighten the crows. To one man she deals out bodily health and strength, to another weakness and disease; to one sound mental powers, to another the horrors of insanity. She distinctly has her favourites, and just as distinctly her objects of aversion. No, Temple, impartiality is the last thing I should attribute to nature. When I celebrate her it may be for her inscrutability, for her hidden purposes, for her entire disregard of what we wish her to be or to do, but I will not praise her for a quality she does not possess.'

'I am too happy to night to enter into an argument,' said Temple; 'so, to save trouble, I will for the moment adopt your view that nature is partial, and say that nature's favourite shall be my favourite, for it seems

as though nature were as much in love with Bessie as I am myself.'

Was not Borradale right in prophesying to Temple on the very evening of their arrival at the cottage that when he did fall in love it would be a very complete fall?

'I shall always owe it to you, my dear Borradale, that you brought me to this place,' said Temple fervently.

'You will, indeed,' replied Borradale, oppressed with the knowledge that he had been the means of introducing him to Bessie Jarvis, though he could not hold himself responsible for the use his friend had made of the introduction.

When Temple could allow himself to be imperceptibly lured away from the one absorbing topic he and Borradale spent the remainder of the evening in impersonal talk. A light shade of melancholy fell on Borradale's buoyant spirit when he thought of the impending separation between himself and

Temple, and noted how he was so taken up with his new passion that he had no thought to spare for old friendship. He seemed as much interested in the price of wheat as in Borradale's approaching departure for the Antipodes, and, when he drew affecting pictures of accident by flood and fire, Temple merely said, 'Whoever heard of one of those big steamers coming to grief? You'll be there and back in no time.' Very differently had he viewed his friend's voyage only a few short weeks before, and the change set Borradale musing over his pipe.

A couple of days later, and the two friends parted, Borradale going to London, and Laurence Temple taking up his quarters at the Crown Inn at Shelton.

'You will come to see me off on the 1st of September, won't you?' asked Borradale as they shook hands warmly.

'Of course I will, and if Bessie won't have me I will go with you to Australia.'

'You would?' and Borradale's eyes lighted up. 'But no, there'll be no such luck. You need not fear but that you are a favourite with Nature's favourite.'

CHAPTER XI.

TEMPLE DECIDES HIS OWN FATE.

'Better too few words from the woman we love than too many: while she is silent, Nature is working for her; while she talks, she is working for herself.'—O. W. Holmes.

It must be confessed that Laurence Temple put the little household at the cottage to great inconvenience by his morning visits, in which he kept Bessie from her domestic duties while he read aloud to her in the little parlour from books she could not understand, and she sat, uneasily enduring, and thinking how cross her mother would be at having to prepare the dinner alone. But his second visit in the day did not clash so seriously with Mrs. Jarvis's household arrangements. In the afternoon

Bessie might sit down to her sewing with a good conscience, and was at liberty to be read to, or talked to, for as long as Laurence felt inclined; and she made a very good audience, for she was naturally taciturn and uncommunicative, more apt to listen than to talk herself. The two men whom she knew best, her father and Job Tolley, were both very loquacious, and she was used to hear them run on by the hour as persistently and incoherently as though they were talking in their sleep. So that, judging by her own personal experience of menfolk, Bessie believed that theirs was the talkative sex, and when she found Mr. Temple also had a great deal to say she concluded that men of all ranks were much alike, and she listened in silence, looking very handsome, and as though she could utter words of wisdom if she chose. And in this way the beauty of her face was displayed, and the poverty of her mind concealed; and her lover was content, for all that

he then wanted was a listener whom he believed to be a sympathetic one.

And, while Laurence was pouring out his mind to Bessie on subjects and in a style equally unintelligible to her, she was hoping that Mr. Temple's visits would make Job Tolley jealous, and determine him at once to ask her to marry him ; or else that Mr. Temple would speak out, for she did not understand his kind of courtship. For Bessie's mind was of a practical turn, and she saw, as clearly as her mother could have pointed it out to her, the danger she ran of losing both her lovers if neither of them should be explicit within a reasonable time. She little imagined that, while Job Tolley wavered to and fro in agonies of indecision, one moment thinking he would risk all for her sake, the next being drawn by the powerful magnet of Harbottle's shop and heiress, Mr. Temple had resolved, from the moment in which he first saw her, to ask her to become his wife. She fitted the

empty shrine in his heart so exactly. He had long pictured to himself such a woman as Bessie, and, now that he believed he had found her, he would claim her for his own. Though he had determined to take a wife from a lower rank, she was not to come to him filled with the prejudice of her class. She was to be sweet and reasonable, gentle and tractable, of the utmost feminine adaptability of mind, that he might realise with her the God-ordained relationship of man, the benevolent master, and woman, the unquestioning pupil. And, subdued by Bessie's beauty, and impressed by meeting her where alone he had decided the divinity was to be found, Laurence did not doubt she was the gracious complement of his being that he had pictured to himself, and nothing short of palpable, disastrous proof of the contrary could shake his confidence in that belief. By the power of his love, and the mastery of his spirit, he would inspire Bessie's untaught mind with

longing after a higher and fuller life, and he himself would cultivate the virgin soil of a rich, but neglected, nature. What might he not make of her? His heart glowed within him at the vision, undaunted by misgivings as to the material he had to work upon.

It was a radiant August afternoon, and the early autumn flowers in Terah Jarvis's garden were languid and drooping in the hot sunshine. Bessie was busy tying up a hollyhock that the wind had blown down, when Temple opened the wicket-gate, and stepped quickly across the grass to her assistance.

'Thank you, Mr. Temple, but I can reach as high as this very well.'

But Laurence took the string from her, and asked Bessie to hold the plant against its support while he tied it firmly to it, and as he did so their hands met. Temple trembled at her touch, but Bessie thought only how much smoother his hands were than Job Tolley's.

'Let us go into the summer arbour, the sun is too hot for us here,' he said, when he had carefully restored the hollyhock to an upright position, and secured it against future accidents.

If Laurence or Bessie had looked behind them as they crossed the garden, they would have seen Mrs. Jarvis watching them intently, with her face pressed close to the kitchen window. In the cool shade of the arbour Laurence took off his hat, and Bessie seated herself on the bench; but she had not brought her sewing with her, and she was ill at ease. Her restless fingers played nervously with the hem of her apron, pinching it up, and then pressing it out on her knee. But nothing that she could do was awkward in her lover's eyes, all was native grace and simplicity.

'Bessie,' he said gently, and she looked up at him, and would hardly have known him. The man was transfigured by strong feeling; he was pale to the lips, and his eyes glowed

like fire. 'Your heart must tell you what I have to say to you,' he said in low, fervent tones. 'I have loved you from the moment I first saw you. I love you more than I can say; more than you can understand. If you can love me well enough to become my wife, Bessie, I will always be your lover, your guide, your teacher, if you will let me. We would live a glorious life together. I would perfect you, while you would lay me under a perpetual obligation, that would never lose its freshness if you could love me well enough to be my wife.'

Bessie did not understand one word of Laurence Temple's meaning, but she promptly seized on the gist of the matter. Mr. Temple had asked her to marry him, that she perfectly understood. The colour surged into her fair face and neck, and, fading as rapidly as it had risen, left her pale as a lily. She was surprised at Temple's emotion, even touched by it.

'You do me a great honour, sir,' she said, clasping her hands in her lap as she spoke.

'It is you, Bessie, who will confer an honour upon me if you can love me, who have nothing to commend me to you. Will you give me the right to love you, guide you, lead you always?' and Temple unclasped her passive hands, and held them firmly in his own.

Bessie was frightened by his gravity and earnestness. Had he taken her in his arms and kissed her, she would have understood it, but she was awed by the grave gentleman before her, so strongly moved by feeling she did not comprehend, and asking her to be his wife as though it were something very dreadful and solemn.

'Will you be my wife, Bessie, and let me love you, and guide you, and help you to develop into the noble woman Nature intends you to be?' And, still holding her hands in his, he waited for her reply as though the fate of the universe depended on the movement of

those beautiful lips. A torrent of thought rushed through her mind before Bessie uttered a word, and her inscrutable eyes rested on Temple's appealing face. She thought, if Job Tolley had asked her to be his wife, he would have done so very differently ; but this perhaps was how gentlemen courted. Mr. Temple had asked her to marry him, and she would of all things like to be a lady, which she understood to mean dressing handsomely and having nothing to do. In her lightning-swift thought she wished that Job Tolley had been the gentleman before her, not understanding that, had it been possible to make a gentleman of Job Tolley, all that now pleased her in him would have disappeared in the transformation.

'Thank you, Mr. Temple, thank you kindly,' she said at last, with downcast eyes and bated breath.

'Does that mean that you can love me, Bessie, and be my wife?' asked Temple, trembling.

'I will be your wife, sir,' and she hastily withdrew her hands from his as little Jack burst into the arbour, shouting, 'Grandfather's come in, and he says where's Bessie, lazying about the garden, instead of getting the tea ready?'

Laurence loathed the child at the moment, and realised what an impertinent, uncalled for, obtrusive existence was little Jack's.

'Go away,' said Bessie sharply, 'and tell father I'm coming directly.'

'I'm not a-going without you come along,' said the child stolidly.

'You will do as you are bid,' said Temple, laying a strong hand on him, and swinging him out of the arbour, whence he sped whimpering to his grandmother.

Temple was jarred through every fibre of his nature by this gross interruption. The exaltation of mind, which a moment before had glorified the arbour into a very heaven, was brought low, and he felt in all

its intensity the vulgarity of Bessie's surroundings.

'Never mind the child, Mr. Temple; children are always in the way,' said Bessie in her low, soft tones. 'But I must go and make the tea, or father 'll be cross.'

The whole scene was disenchanted, and Temple's garden of Eden nothing better than a bower of Virginia creeper, such as any cockney might boast—mean, sordid, and unromantic. And beautiful Bessie herself was just a shade—no, not that, anything in the whole world but that! It was her surroundings only that were so shockingly vulgar, and she herself wholly uncontaminated by them, Temple assured himself vehemently.

'My Bessie,' he said when he could control himself sufficiently to speak calmly, 'you belong more to me now than to those—those good people there,' and he cast a sore glance towards the house.

'Yes, sir,' said Bessie softly.

'You must never call me "sir" again, my darling. You have a great deal to learn. I will not keep you now, and to-morrow I will come and speak to your father,' and Temple left the arbour as he heard Terah Jarvis calling, 'Bessie, Bessie, wherever is the girl?'

'Don't keep on shouting like that,' said Bessie angrily as soon as Temple was out of hearing. 'You might ha' known I should a' come if something particular wasn't keeping me,' and Terah saw by his daughter's flushed face and agitated manner that something unusual had occurred.

'Make haste then and get my tea, and you can tell me what's worrited you.'

'Why couldn't mother ha' got tea ready?'

''Cause one of her chicks is took bad, and she's givin' it peppercorns in the poultry yard,' and without further exchange of question and answer Bessie entered the house, and began to prepare the afternoon meal.

Terah watched his daughter as she moved

about the kitchen with a quick, firm step, and there was a deep colour in her cheek, and an unwonted brightness in her eye; and when he spoke to her she merely said 'yes' or 'no' in an abrupt and explosive manner. Terah Jarvis had not been the only man in his small feminine household for so long without observing that his womenkind were liable to sudden and inexplicable changes of mood. And when wife or daughter underwent an abrupt and unlovely change of manner and temper without any apparent cause Terah philosophically thought to himself, 'Leave 'er be, and she'll come round,' and in her own time she always did come round. So now, instead of attempting conversation with his daughter, who set the tea things on the table with unnecessary clatter, and applied the poker to the fire as if it were a personal enemy, he sat softly whistling, and drumming on the window-sill with his gnarled fingers, waiting for Bessie to 'come round.'

'Eh, father, I'm afraid we shan't hardly rear that bramah cockerell,' said Mrs. Jarvis, bustling into the kitchen by the back door, with little Jack hanging to her skirts. 'He's took his peppercorn like a Christian, but he's got a far-away look in his eye as I don't like; it puts me in mind of poor old Mr. Bates, how he looked when he'd made his will, and it was soon over with 'im. Why, Bessie, where's Mr. Temple?'

Bessie coloured up to her forehead. 'Gone,' she replied briefly.

'I never knew as he'd come,' said Terah from his chair by the window.

'Why, father, him and Bessie was in the summer arbour not so long ago.'

'Oh, oh,' thought Terah, 'that's why she was none so pleased at being fetched to make the tea.'

'Father, next time you want me I'll thank you not to send little Jack a bothering after me,' said Bessie testily as she tied a napkin

rather tightly round Jack's neck before he began his tea.

'Highty, tighty! what's the matter now?' said her father.

'I won't 'ave little Jack teased, I won't,' said Mrs. Jarvis. 'I'm sure he come to me just now quite put about, he did. Someone had a been vexing him.' And the little boy, hearing himself pitied, immediately felt that he was a victim, and rubbed his fat fists in his eyes; but, being unable to squeeze out a tear, he set up a dry grizzle instead.

'Hold your noise!' said his handsome young aunt, in tones that fairly astonished her parents. 'If that child had come five minutes sooner to the summer arbour he might a' done me a lasting mischief.'

'Whatever 'as the child been doing?' asked his grandmother in amazement.

'He come bursting in on me and Mr. Temple just when he'd asked me to marry him,' said Bessie, with head slightly thrown

back, and a complacency of pride that seemed to add to her height, and that certainly enhanced her beauty.

Mrs. Jarvis's tumult of excited feeling found vent in delivering a shower of sharp smacks on little Jack's shoulders, who, finding himself thus suddenly and unaccountably forsaken by his hitherto constant ally, now shed good salt tears in earnest. But nobody heeded him.

Terah Jarvis set down the cup he was raising to his lips, and looked at his daughter with respect and awe.

'Did you say as Mr. Temple had asked you to marry him?'

'Aye, father, he's asked me to be his wife, sure enough.'

'And you said "Yes" before that naughty little boy come a pestering you?' asked her mother with feverish anxiety.

'What should I say but yes?' replied Bessie in her usual calm voice.

'Well, blessings and praisings that after all our trouble with our other girl our Bessie's going to be took right out of our speer and made a lady of! Well, to be sure, what could Mr. Temple be thinking of? But it's all for the best. Did he kiss you, child?'

'No, mother; but he might a' done if little Jack hadn't come worrying,' and Bessie's handsome brows contracted as she glanced at her nephew, who, having now become callous, had ceased crying, and was stolidly eating his bread and butter.

'You've took my breath away,' said Terah Jarvis, pushing his chair from the table. 'To think as a gentleman like Mr. Temple should ask to marry a daughter o' mine!'

'And ain't your daughter as good as any one's?' asked his wife sharply.

'Mr. Temple thinks her better, seemingly,' said Terah with a slow smile; 'but it gets over me. You'd ought to be very proud, Bessie, and to hold your 'ead high'

'Aye, she'll be proud enough when she's a lady,' said her mother sumptuously. Then, turning to her little grandson with a sudden change of tone and manner, she said sharply, 'Jack, if ever you're saucy to your Aunt Bessie again, I'll give it you.'

'You won't care no more for your old daddy when you're a fine lady,' said Terah, looking proudly at his daughter, whose extreme hardness of expression through all her beauty unconsciously impressed him.

'You've no call to say that, father; I shall do what I can for you,' said Bessie condescendingly.

'When Bessie's Mrs. Temple she'll know her place, and we shall know ours,' said her mother. 'To think of me, as has worked hard all my life, having a daughter that won't need to put her hand to anything! When you're a lady, my dear, you can lie on the sofa with your 'eels up all day, and the bell-pull in your 'and; and the oftener you ring it the more you'll be doing your dooty.'

Bessie, who had a fine natural talent for doing nothing, highly relished her mother's vivid description of the duties and privileges of a lady.

'I must say,' said Terah Jarvis, 'it's queer as Mr. Temple don't want to marry one of his own sort.'

'Well, father, if I'm not Mr. Temple's sort, I'm sure Mr. Temple is not mine,' said Bessie quietly.

'You've got to settle it between you. It's none of my doings,' replied her father.

'Mr. Temple's coming to speak to you to-morrow, father.'

'I'm sure I'm proud, I'm very proud to hear it,' said Terah.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON